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| Title | Transmission, metre and language: some observations on the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe |
| Creators | Hoyne, Mícheál |
| Date | 2019 |
| Citation | Hoyne, Mícheál (2019) Transmission, metre and language: some observations on the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe. In: Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe: the poet and his craft. Irish Texts Society, pp. 24-70. |
| URL | https://dair.dias.ie/id/eprint/1073/ |

Transmission, metre and language:

Some observations on the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe

Mícheál Hoyne

INTRODUCTION

1 In discussing Classical Modern Irish poetry language and metrics are best treated together.¹ Classical Modern Irish is the literary register described in the later medieval grammatico-metrical tracts and practised in the ‘bardic’ poetry which dominated the landscape of courtly literature in Irish from the thirteenth century down to the collapse of the Gaelic order in Ireland. In the course of the Early Irish period, the rules of syllabic poetry became progressively more rigid, so that by the beginning of the thirteenth century, the professional court-poets had imposed upon themselves an elaborate metrical system memorably described by Brian Ó Cuív as a ‘prosodic straightjacket’.² In order that the *file* could effectively convey his intended message in a given poem written in accordance with the rules of strict verse or

¹ *I am grateful to the organisers of the ITS seminar for the invitation to contribute and for their hospitality; to those who attended the seminar for helpful discussion; and to Prof. Damian McManus for reading a version of this paper and suggesting important improvements. Responsibility for all errors, omissions and infelicities lies with me alone.

A distinction is now usually made between ‘Early Modern Irish’, an umbrella term which describes all forms of Irish written and spoken between c. 1200 and c. 1650, and ‘Classical (Early) Modern Irish’, the register of formal syllabic poetry. See McManus, ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, 335.

² Ó Cuív, ‘Some developments in Irish metrics’, 290. Ó Cuív’s seminal paper tracks the development of the metre *deibhidhe* from the earliest sources to the thirteenth century. While the rules of rhyme and alliteration became more rigid in the course of the development of the *dán díreach* standard (from the seventh century to the thirteenth), it is important to note that the direction of travel was not always towards greater metrical elaboration. In the case of *aoi fhreislighe*, for example, Liam Breatnach (‘*Araile felmac féig don Mumain*’, 117–19) notes that earlier examples of this metre have perfect end-rhyme between lines *b* and *d* (occasionally also between *a* and *c*) and some even have a form of internal rhyme; in Classical Modern Irish on the other hand, *aoi fhreislighe* is always metrically loose *ógláchas* with only broken rhyme between *b* and *d* and no internal rhyme of any kind. Similarly, by the thirteenth century *deibhidhe* metre (outside of one example of the rare *deibhidhe imrinn* type, for which see §24 below) does not allow internal rhymes in the first couplet, but internal rhyme in this position is well attested in Middle Irish verse (Breatnach, ‘*Cinnus atá do thinnrem*’, 7; *ibid*, ‘*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti in dána*’, 55–7).

dán díreach, it was necessary that the flexibility of the literary language should stand in due proportion to the rigidity of the metrical system. To extend Ó Cuív's metaphor, the great variety of variant forms allowed in the grammatical tracts gave the poet the linguistic slack he needed to manoeuvre within his metrical restraints. In describing any feature of the Classical Modern Irish register, therefore, whether in the round or as exemplified by the usage of an individual poet or school of poets, metrical exigencies should always be borne in mind.³

2 Every student of bardic poetry will be familiar with Eleanor Knott's magisterial edition of the poetry of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn,⁴ the two volumes of which have been described as the 'most valuable of all those issued by the [Irish Texts] Society'.⁵ Not the least of the triumphs of that edition is the introduction, which includes an enormous amount of information about the motifs of bardic poetry, the Classical Modern Irish idiom and the metrical system for which it was employed.⁶ Regrettably, Williams's edition of the poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe does not include an introduction addressing metrical, linguistic or stylistic topics. In part this may have been because, to use Knott's words, '[d]uring the period 1250–1650 the regulations governing the bardic order do not vary perceptibly. Language, metre, methods of composition and declamation are similar for at least four centuries'.⁷ Or again: 'In literary style bardic poetry shows as a whole no epochs or tendencies. It is a flat table-land stretching from the 13th to the 17th century'.⁸ It could be argued, therefore, that a linguistic and metrical introduction to the poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe as opposed to bardic poetry as a whole would be redundant; if the metrical and linguistic norm of bardic poetry did not change over time or from school to school, we require only grammars and guides to metrics that span the whole period from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century and these need make no distinction between individuals, schools or epochs. Indeed, even Knott's own treatment of

³ It is not my intention to suggest that the Classical register was a linguistic 'free-for-all'. As the term 'Classical' implies, the language of poetry represented a literary standard and, in some respects, a quite conservative one. While a great deal of variation was tolerated in Classical Modern Irish, certain forms (both inherited historical and more recent developments) were dispreferred or prohibited outright. For a survey of the Classical Modern Irish register, see McManus, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach', and for the concepts of *ceart* 'correct', *canamhain* 'correct but anomalous' and *lochtach* 'faulty' in contemporary grammatical thought, see McManus, 'Fault-finding in the Grammatical Tracts'.

⁴ Knott, *Tadhg Dall*.

⁵ Binchy, 'Eleanor Knott', 184.

⁶ Knott, *Tadhg Dall*, I, xiv–cvii.

⁷ Knott, *Tadhg Dall*, I, xxxviii, and cf. lxx.

⁸ Knott, *Tadhg Dall*, I, li.

language, metre and style in her *Tadhg Dall*, treats of bardic poetry in the round for the most part; true, special mention is made of Tadhg Dall's usage, for example, in the section on language,⁹ but it is clear that Knott's introduction was designed to serve as much as a guide to bardic poetry in general as to the poems which she presented in her edition.

3 I do not disagree with Knott that Classical Modern Irish language, metre and style were resistant to whole-scale change, but I would highlight how carefully she formulated her description of the conservatism of bardic poetry in the citations above: 'the regulations... do not vary **perceptibly**', 'bardic poetry shows **as a whole** no epochs or tendencies'. We should be alive to the possibility that with sufficiently fine-grained studies it may become possible to perceive some variation, to speak in diachronic terms of a given metrical or linguistic feature or perhaps even to localise a poem to a given school or network of schools, even if it may never be possible to say with certainty on linguistic or metrical grounds that a given poem is, say, of thirteenth-century rather than fifteenth-century date and by an Ó Dálaigh rather than an Ó hUiginn.

Recent research has already broken new ground in this territory. Pádraig Breatnach, for example, has refined our understanding of the development within the Classical Modern Irish period of internal rhyme in the first half-couplet (*seóladh*) of poems in the metre *rannai gheacht mhór*: in almost all examples of this common metre before the fifteenth century, only perfect internal rhymes occur, but from the [middle of the](#) fifteenth century onwards imperfect rhymes begin to spread in the *seóladh*, so that by the end of the sixteenth century as many as half of the internal rhymes in the *seóladh* of a given poem may be imperfect; there is some evidence of a reversal of this trend towards the very end of the bardic period with a revival of a more ornate pre-[sixteenth-fifteenth](#) century style.¹⁰ The grammatical and metrical tracts themselves provide evidence of development and divergence of opinion. Damian McManus has drawn attention to explicit references in the tracts to differences of opinion between schools (see §39).¹¹ As we will see below (§7), the fact that some linguistic aspects of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe's poetry are condemned in the tracts may suggest change over time in the rules of the Classical Modern Irish idiom. I have argued that the term *aoi* (or *ai*) *trasgartha* 'vanquished <aoi> (or <ai>)' was coined in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century by bardic grammarian-prosodists to account for

⁹ Knott, *Tadhg Dall*, I, lxxv–lxxxv.

¹⁰ Breatnach, 'Ornamentation in *rannai gheacht*'.

¹¹ McManus, 'Fault-finding in the Grammatical Tracts', 207–9.

relatively recent changes in orthographical practice (see §28 below). Admittedly, it may be no easy task attempting to add contours to the map of an apparently flat tableland, and it is likely that whatever variation over time and between schools there may have been was subtle enough, but these might very well be the sorts of details that a tightly-focused study description of a given poet's language and metrical practice (and a full glossary) could bring to our attention.

SCOPE OF THIS PAPER

4 I do not aim here to supply a linguistic and metrical introduction (nor a glossary) to the poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, but in what follows I will attempt to highlight some issues that bear on our understanding of language and metre in his poetry, namely the manner in which his poems have been transmitted to us and the difficulties associated with establishing a corpus of authentic poems by our poet, and I will then try and give some sense of linguistic and metrical variation in Giolla Brighde's poetry as a small contribution to an understanding of the artistry of his work. As discussed in §1, these two interrelated formal aspects of Mac Con Midhe's poetry – his use in crafting his poems of the resources of the register of poetry and of the license allowed him by metre – are inextricably interlinked. There is, of course, much more to composing effective and affecting poetry such as Mac Con Midhe produced than mere command of language and metre, but it is nonetheless crucial to appreciate these more technical aspects of the poet's craft if one is to form a proper sense of the craftsmanship behind a given line, half-quatrain, quatrain or a whole poem.

GIOLLA BRIGHDE MAC CON MIDHE AND THE GRAMMATICAL TRACTS

5 A study of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe's use of language and metre is all the more appropriate given that his work was assiduously studied by succeeding generations of bardic poets. He was clearly highly regarded by the professors of the bardic schools in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the period when the majority of the metrical-grammatical tracts were compiled. Some fifteen poems attributed to him are cited in the tracts.¹² *Aoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain*, the long elegy (81 quatrains) on Brian Ó Néill

¹² For full details of citations from the tracts, see the files named 'Citations' and 'Cited poems' available from the website of the Department of Irish and Celtic Languages, Trinity College Dublin

(tcd.ie/Irish/research/database.php) (accessed 9 April 2019). As I explain below (§15###), I am doubtful about the authenticity of the ascription to Giolla Brighde of the famous *A theachtair thig ón Róimh*, while Williams (p. 356) holds it to be 'very unlikely' Mac Con Midhe really composed *Crann do chuir amach Naoi nár*, both of which are cited in the tracts.

(and others) is cited twelve times, making it the single most-cited identified poem in the tracts, but remarkable also is the high number of citations (eight in all) from the religious poem *Lá bhraith an Choimdheadh an Chéadaoin*, with a more modest 42 quatrains. Similarly, *Mairg do ghríos Giolla Pádraig*, Mac Con Midhe’s apology to Ó hAnluain for a kinsman’s satire, scores five citations for only 32 quatrains. The rest are cited four times or less.

6 As an example of the function performed by these citations, I will refer briefly to two extracts from poems by Giolla Brighde in one section of *IGT* III–IV, a grammatical tract on *pearsain*, that is ‘abstract nouns’, which for bardic grammarians included verbal nouns (from which they ‘derived’ the finite forms of verbs) and nouns derived from adjectives.¹³ The first section of this tract is headed *déanamh, déineamh, déanaimh, déinimh*, the four permitted variants of the verbal noun of *do-ní* ‘makes, does’. Information is given on the morphology of these variants and then on finite verbal forms of *do-ní*, followed by examples from poetry that illustrate in metrically-fixed form correct and incorrect usage. The seventh citation runs as follows: *Ar phéin do fhóiris na huile. do-róinis féin duine dítt*, ‘You saved everyone from damnation, you made yourself human’. This corresponds to Williams’s XIX.17cd,¹⁴ the poem *Déan oram trócaire, a Thríonóid*, the only instance of a citation from that poem in the tracts. The perfect rhyme between *do-róinis* and *do fhóiris* fixes the form of the 2 sing. simple past of *do-ní* here: the other forms allowed by the tract are *do-rinnis, do-roinnis, do-rínis, do-righnis, do-roighnis* and *do-rónais*, but none of these will make the required perfect rhyme with *do fhóirais*. Citation 13 reads: *Fagaib cerd do-né an delg dresa. máss é delg as measa amuigh*, ‘Find the craftsman who could make the bramble-thorn, even though it is the worst thorn there is!’, i.e. no craftsman however gifted can compete with God’s handiwork. This is a half-quatrain from the much-cited *Lá bhraith an Choimdheadh an Chéadaoin* (= Williams XXI.30cd), though the text of *IGT* III (and also *BST* 66a.11,¹⁵ where this half-quatrain is also

¹³ For some general remarks on the structure of *IGT* III–IV and the grammatical thinking which underlies it, see Hoyne, ‘*Seacht bpearsain fhichead uair mé*’, 99–101.

¹⁴ I cite poems attributed to Giolla Brighde and edited by Williams using Roman numerals. References to ‘Williams’ followed by a page number also refer to the edition.

¹⁵ ‘*IGT VI*’, a tract on the subjunctive, which has been made available on the website of the Irish Dept. of TCD (<https://www.tcd.ie/Irish/research/database.php>; accessed 30 June 2019), contains a very similar couplet, but in the metre *deibhidhe*: *Ceard do-né an droigen no an dealg, ní fhoigheabh e acht an t-encheard*, ‘I cannot [lit. ‘I will not’] a craftsman who could make the blackthorn or the thorn [itself] except for the supreme craftsman [i.e. God]’. My thanks to Damian McManus for drawing my attention to this example.

cited) differs somewhat from that of the edition (see §12 below). The perfect rhyme between *do-né* and *é* confirms the form of the 3 sing. relative present subjunctive of *do-ní* here.¹⁶

7 The number of poems cited and the number of discreet citations from each poem is perhaps a crude measure of the attention given to a poet's oeuvre in the schools,¹⁷ but it is safe to conclude that Giolla Brighde had a special place on the curriculum of the bardic academies.¹⁸ One mark of Mac Con Midhe's stature in the bardic schools is, perhaps paradoxically, the frequency with which citations from his work that are marked as faulty occur in the tracts. The late-fifteenth/early sixteenth-century grammatical tracts are prescriptive in the sense that some forms are prescribed, others forbidden, some preferred, others discouraged, and so on; they are also descriptive in that they are clearly an attempt to capture the usage of the celebrated masters of syllabic verse who flourished in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and whose work is cited there. Given Giolla Brighde's stature as a master of the bardic craft in the early days of *dán díreach* and the fact that students would be familiar with his work and likely to take him as a model, particular importance attached to registering aspects of his usage that did not accord with later strictures (or with the opinions of other schools). Several examples from the work of our poet that fell afoul of bardic grammarians are discussed by Damian McManus.¹⁹ Particularly interesting is his suggestion that some of the more historically correct features proscribed in the poetry of Giolla Brighde may have

¹⁶ In *BST*, where this half-quatrain is also cited, it is quoted as an example of the correct use of the subjunctive in a relative clause the headword of which is unreal.

¹⁷ We must, of course, recall that the compilers of the tract were concerned with illustrating in metrically-fixed form the words and constructions under discussion. The fact that Giolla Brighde rather than any other poet is cited may be significant, but in the case of a fairly rare word like *bodhaing* 'prop (?), pillar (?)', for which a half-quatrain by our poet is quoted (*IGT* II §13 ex. 643 = I.27cd), there may have been few other examples to hand.

On the issue of rare words, a full individual glossary of the poetry of Giolla Brighde (and other poets) would be a boon to Classical Modern Irish studies. A number of rare words occur in his poetry. IV.35 *sglainn*, acc. sing. of *sglann* (?), for example, is one of only two attestations given in the Dictionary (*eDIL* s.v. *sclann*), and I know of no other occurrence of the word *measán* 'pet' (V.4) in Classical Modern Irish.

¹⁸ In giving the number of citations above, I provided the figure only for the total number of discreet citations from a given poem and not the number of unique citations. For example, *níor chóir síon acht clá is ceatha / lá ríogh an bheatha do bhrath*, 'it was not right that there should be good weather but ice-spikes and rain on the day that the king of the world was betrayed' (XXI.1ab), from the poem *Lá bhraith an Choimheadh an Chéadaoin*, is cited twice in *IGT* II – once (ex. 1456) to illustrate *ceatha* and *beatha*, on the second occasion (ex. 1781) to illustrate *clá*.

¹⁹ 'Fault-finding in the Grammatical Tracts', especially pp. 216–17, 220–1, 223–4.

been regarded as acceptable in the early thirteenth century and only later came to be perceived as incorrect.

Take, for example, the following quatrain from our poet's *Deasgadh gach uilc an t-uabhar* (XX.30), the second half of which is cited in *IGT* II §38, where it is marked as faulty:

Féar agus croinn is cairge
agus gaineamh glasfhairge
gach frosa sneachta dá snigh –
ní hosa a fhearta d'áirimh.

‘Grass and trees and rocks and the sand of every green sea, every shower of snow that it snows – it is no easier to count his wonders [than them].’²⁰

IGT II is concerned with the declension of nouns (and adjectives), and §38 deals specifically with nouns that are declined like masc. *trágh* ‘beach’ (gen. *trágha*, nom. pl. *tráigh* and *trágha*, etc.).²¹ After a paradigm of masc. *trágh*, there is a long list of nouns that pattern the same way. This list includes masc. *fros* and its variant *fras* ‘shower’.²² As pointed out by McManus,²³ the word-list in *IGT* does not give *frosa* (or for that matter *frasa*) as a faulty variant form, though one could certainly take it from the above citation that such a variant existed. It is more likely, as argued by McManus, that Giolla Brighde's *gach frosa* represents not *gach* + nom. sing. *fros* but rather *gach* + nom. pl. *frosa*. While Old Irish allowed the plural after *cech/cach* (> *gach*), the singular is the overwhelming norm in Classical Modern Irish. Whether the point of the label *lochtach* ‘faulty’ after this citation in *IGT* was to forbid a variant *frosa* (misinterpreting Giolla Brighde's usage or seeking to forestall such a misinterpretation) or whether it was meant as a comment on *gach* + plural is unclear. For our purposes, it is enough to note that Mac Con Midhe's prestige was such that student-poets combing through his work might well have followed him into ‘error’ (as understood by later

²⁰ I incorporate here a suggested improvement to Williams's translation made by McManus (‘Fault-finding in the Grammatical Tracts’, 223).

²¹ Nouns declined like fem. *trágh* (gen. *tráighe*) are the subject of *IGT* II §39. In some versions of *IGT* II, §§38 and 39 form a single unit. Masc. *tráigh* (gen. *trágha*) and fem. *tráigh* (gen. *trágha* and *tráighe*) are treated in §§41 and 42 respectively.

²² Feminine variants are listed in *IGT* II §39.

²³ ‘Fault-finding in the Grammatical Tracts’, 223–4.

grammarians) and so the grammarians felt obliged to register the aberrant forms and constructions that might be encountered in his work.²⁴

8 Finally, the obvious fact that so many poems attributed to our poet have survived at all is itself testimony to the high regard in which Mac Con Midhe's poetry was held. In the ordinary run of things, bardic poems will not have been copied very often: a common or garden bardic praise-poem in honour of a member of the Ó hAnluain family, for example, may have been of interest to that family but will not have found many interested readers (or auditors) beyond the small lordship of Ó hAnluain in the south of present-day County Armagh; it would not have been studied in the schools, would not have circulated nationally and would have been unlikely to attract the attention of the men who compiled the great miscellanies of bardic poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through which so much material has been preserved for us. Mac Con Midhe's poem of apology, *Mairg do ghríos Giolla Pádraig* – to take one example more or less at random – is not a common or

²⁴ The presence of 'faults' such as the older use of *gach* + plural in Mac Con Midhe's poetry adds weight to Williams's suggestion that we should read *Rí for a uaisle d'fhuil C[h]onail / ar Chloinn Eoghain do budh fháth*, 'A king of the blood of Conall ruling over the Sons of Eoghan by virtue of his nobility would be a wise notion' (I.15ab), where the MS has *ar* and not *for* in the first line, leaving the line a syllable short after vowel-elision. Though a feature of pseudo-archaising in prose texts (McManus, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach', 434), *for* is not normal in Classical Modern Irish. Here too then we may have an example in Giolla Brighde's poetry of an older form that later fell out of the Classical register. On this point, I would also draw attention here to the double article in *an dara cuing an chatha* 'the second half of the yoke of battle' (III.24a). I do not see how this can be emended away, but the double article without a demonstrative suffix is unusual in Early Modern Irish: *an t-aos dána-sa an Iarla* 'these poets of the Earl' is grammatical but, as in living Modern Irish, **an t-aos dána an Iarla* 'the poets of the Earl' is not; accordingly, we would expect *dara cuing an chatha* here (cf. *dara mac na mná móerda* 'the second son of the stately woman'; McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, *A Bardic Miscellany*, poem 102.8b) or *an dara cuing don chath* – neither of which would be metrical. The double article in *an dara cuing an chatha* could be another archaism in the language of Giolla Brighde, because the likes of *innaplage innanasar* 'of the disaster of the Assyrians' and *forsin fordorus ind liss* 'on the lintel of the court' are found in Old and Middle Irish respectively (see Ó Gealbháin 'The double article and related features of genitive syntax' for a discussion and pp. 133 and 135 of that paper for the Old and Middle Irish examples quoted). This is the only example of a 'non-grammatical' use of the double article in the poems of Giolla Brighde I have noticed, but it is not surprising that an ordinal number like *dara* should resist article-deletion longer than other types of words: like the demonstrative suffix, ordinals normally only occur with the article (*an céad-X*, *an treas X*, etc.); the fact that the article is normally necessary to license the use of the demonstrative suffix is presumably why the likes of *an t-aos dána-sa an Iarla* remain grammatical in the later language, even when **an t-aos dána an Iarla* comes to be regarded as incorrect, but the same process has not exempted the ordinals from the double article constraint.

garden bardic poem, however: it survives not because it is found in an Ó hAnluain patronal poem-book or *duanaire* – no such manuscript exists and Mac Con Midhe’s poem is the sole extant example of a bardic poem in honour of any Ó hAnluain – nor because a manuscript collection devoted to Giolla Brighde’s work has come down to us – frustratingly we can only ponder the full extent of his output –, but because four centuries later the poem made its way into two general-interest miscellanies of bardic poetry (The Book of O’Conor Don written for Captain Somhairle Mac Domhnaill in Ostend in 1631 and the seventeenth-century Munster manuscript RIA 23 D 4).²⁵ In other words, the poem acquired a wider readership than its original honorand and his family; it circulated in manuscripts outside the sphere of influence of the individuals or family directly associated with it; it came to be studied in the schools and it was available (in now lost manuscript copies) to late anthologists.²⁶ The posthumous success enjoyed by Giolla Brighde will come as no surprise, however, to anyone who has read a good deal of bardic poetry and has taken the time to savour the work of the masters: one can only agree with Williams (p. 1) that Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe was a very fine poet and a cut above many other practitioners of his art.²⁷

²⁵ Only the apologue (see the next footnote) is copied in 23 D 4. For some discussion of this poem, see Simms, ‘Bardic poems of apology and reconciliation’, 179–80. Students of Early Irish law have particular reason to be glad that this poem did survive. *Mairg do ghríos Giolla Pádraig* is an example of ‘praise which washes away satire’ (for which see, Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, 138) and on that subject Giolla Brighde recounts as an apologue the story of the legendary and famously cantankerous poet Aithirne and the river Mourne. Aithirne takes offence when the river refused to yield a salmon to him and he satirises the river, which then proceeds to break its banks and pursue the demanding poet. To placate the river, Aithirne composes a praise-poem and so undoes the damage of his original satire. This story is preserved in *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* but is acephalous there. The importance of Mac Con Midhe’s poem for understanding the passage in *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* was recognised by E.J. Gwynn in his edition of the relevant text (‘An Old-Irish tract on the privileges and responsibilities of poets’, 13, 57). Giolla Brighde may have had this story from *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* or another (now lost) source. He was clearly well-versed in older literature. His poem *Ceathrar is fhéile fuair Flann* (IV), for example, announces in its first line his familiarity with poetry attributed (probably wrongly) to Flann mac Lonáin (d. 896 or 918), and he was likely also familiar with poetry attributed to Flann Mainistreach (d. 1056) to judge from his poem *Conall cuingidh cloinne Néill* (III). For further details of older literature used by Giolla Brighde, see William’s notes to his edition and Katharine Simms’ ‘The Donegal poems in the Book of Fenagh’.

²⁶ For this model of transmission, see McManus, ‘The bardic poet as teacher, student and critic’, 109–10.

²⁷ It should be noted that Giolla Brighde’s prominence in the tracts and later manuscripts bears no relation to his family’s reputation: only eighteen poems are attributed to other members of the Mac Con Midhe family from the thirteenth century down to the seventeenth against the nineteen that can be reliably ascribed to Giolla Brighde. These figures are drawn from the Bardic Poetry Database compiled by Dr Katharine Simms and available on the

SOME TEXTUAL ISSUES

9 Before attempting a study of linguistic and metrical variation in the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, we must first take stock of the obstacles in the way of such an investigation. The first requirement for an investigation of Mac Con Midhe's poetry is, of course, a reliable edition. Williams's edition has not been superseded since its appearance in 1980, but – like any extensive work of scholarship – it is not without its flaws. Unfortunately, especially for our purposes, the text as presented is not always metrical and some editorial decisions are open to question. In most instances, points where improvements could be made will be recognised immediately by any student of Classical Modern Irish. In I.11b, for example, we read *d'aicme Eoghain, más fíor dóibh*, but the metre requires *más fhíor* for alliteration with *Eoghain*.²⁸

10 Occasionally we must turn to the manuscript readings to improve the printed text. For example, consider the quatrain

Is aistear budh éasgaidh linn

ón tí oirthearaigh d'Éirinn

sódh go bile seang Sodhain

ar cheann idhe urchomhail.

‘It is a journey that I will find easy, to return to the slender oak of Sodhan from the eastern part of Ireland for the sake of a spancel-ring’ (XIV.8b)

For *tí*, the manuscript (RIA 23 F 16, The Book of O’Gara) has *toigh*, and this is duly noted by the editor, who discusses the problem in the textual notes: ‘The text is unsatisfactory here: *toigh* which is usually masculine, cannot be followed by the fem. dat. adjective *oirthearaigh*; I emend to *tí* ‘place’ fem.; this emendation was first made by O’Grady in his quotation from Eg. 111 [...]; Eg. 111 like F reads *toigh*.’ There are several problems with this emendation.

website of the Dublin Institute (bardic.celt.dias.ie). Incidentally, our Giolla Brighde is referred in two poems by Brian Ruadh Mac Con Midhe for Neachtain Ó Domhnaill (d. 1452) (Williams, pp. 3–4).

²⁸ For lenition after *más*, see McManus, ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, 417. Besides the slip concerning lenition after *más*, I would note the letter *a* written in the margin beside this quatrain in Rawlinson B 514, the sole copy of the entire poem. The letter *b* is written before the preceding quatrain (quatrain 10 in Williams’s edition). This is a scribal device used to indicate the proper sequence of quatrains: in this case, quatrain 11 of Williams’s edition (marked *a*) is to be read before quatrain 10 (marked *b*).

Firstly, I do not know of any other example of *tí* ‘marked line, spot’ used to mean ‘place’, but secondly and more seriously, the statement that ‘*toigh* which is usually masculine, cannot be followed by the fem. dat. adjective’ is false. *Teach/teagh, magh* and also *gleann* and *sliabh*, though masculine, can take a feminine attributive adjective in the dative singular in Classical Modern Irish. This is described by bardic grammarians as *moladh canamhna* ‘anomalous adjectival qualification’.²⁹ We should therefore adhere to the manuscript text and read *ón toigh oirthearaigh d’Éirinn*. The poem in question is the beautiful *Dearmhad do fhágghas ag Aodh*,³⁰ written in praise of Aodh Ó Conchobhair of Connacht, in which the poet admits to feigning forgetfulness so as to have excuses to return to Ó Conchobhair’s house in search of lost belongings of his. In that context, I would understand the line *ón toigh oirthearaigh d’Éirinn* to mean ‘the eastern-most house of Ireland’, i.e. the house furthest from Ó Conchobhair’s residence.

11 Thankfully, as in the last-mentioned instance, even where one may disagree with Williams’s interpretation, he normally registers departures from the manuscript(s) at the foot of his edition and discusses such emendations in the notes. While we must be mindful then that no edition of a bardic poem is perfect (not least those produced by the present writer), Williams has done a great service in providing us with the basis to investigate in more detail metrical and linguistic features in the work of Giolla Brighde.

QUESTIONS OF TRANSMISSION

²⁹ See *IGT* II §§31 and 164. By Classical Modern Irish, the use of a form of the attributive adjective proper to a feminine noun with oblique case-forms of masculine nouns is confined to a small number of old *s*-stems, but this feature of adjectival declension was once more widespread, affecting other consonantal stems and even masculine *i*-stems. See O’Brien, ‘Two passages in *Serglige Con Culaind*’ and ‘Short notes’, 102; Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 252; McManus, ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, 384, [and ‘Fault-finding in the Grammatical Tracts’, 211](#); and Kobel, ‘A note on the use of a feminine adjective’. A remnant of *moladh canamhna* survived into Modern Irish, at least in the Irish of Tomás Ó Criomhthain, in the form adopted by the adjective *mór* in *an tigh móir*. *Tigh*, historically dative singular, not only took over the function of nominative singular in his dialect, but brought the *moladh canamhna* inflection of the attributive adjective into that case as well, at least in that one phrase (Ó Coileáin, *An tOileánach*, xxxvi–xxxvii).

³⁰ Incidentally, Williams sometimes prints *dearmad* (e.g. XIV.1) and sometimes *dearmhad* (e.g. XIV.4), but the latter is the more historical form (in OIr *do-ruimnethar* ‘forgets’, the *-m-* is lenited) and most likely that used by bardic poets. Munster Irish *dearúd* and Manx *jarrood* continue the historical form, while Connacht, Ulster and Scottish Gaelic *dearmad* shows secondary de-lenition of an original lenited *-m-*.

12 Another difficulty to be borne in mind before undertaking a study of the language and metrics of a given poet is the nature of manuscript transmission.³¹ We have no autograph copies of Mac Con Midhe's work nor even a near-contemporary copy of a single poem.³² Williams registers no manuscript earlier than the fifteenth century and most witnesses are later than that (pp. 5–8). We have to reckon, therefore, with two or more centuries between the death of the poet and our earliest records of his work. In that period (and subsequently), his poems were copied and subjected to the conscious or unconscious modifications and corruptions that are inevitable in the process of copying. The strict metre of Giolla Brighde's poetry and our understanding of the Classical Modern Irish idiom can allow us to restore an authorial text with some degree of certainty, but questions will remain. For example, I have already referred to a half-quaternion cited in the grammatical tracts to indicate relative present subjunctive *do-né*: *Fagaib cerd do-né an delg dresa. máss é delg as measa amuigh*. For *Faghaibh ceard*, with 2 sing. imperative of the verb *do-gheibh* ('Find [me] the craftsman who...!'), National Library of Scotland 72.1.25, a sixteenth-century (?) vellum and the sole copy of the complete poem, reads *Cúich an ceard* 'Who is the craftsman who...?'. Williams follows 72.1.25, but there is no metrical or linguistic impediment to reading *faghaibh* (and, indeed, to my mind, that is the *lectio difficilior*).³³ In what follows, I confine myself as far as possible to points fixed my metre, where we are on fairly sure ground.³⁴

ESTABLISHING A CORPUS

13 The nature of the transmission of Giolla Brighde's work throws up larger interpretative questions than that of how sound or faithful to the original a given manuscript's text of one of his poems is. None of our manuscript sources could be said to be a *duanaire* devoted to our poet's work, like the famous anthology of poems by Tadhg Óg (d. 1448) and Tuathal Ó hUiginn (d. 1450) written in 1473 and now bound with the Yellow Book of Lecan (TCD H 2.16), and none of the manuscripts in which Mac Con Midhe's work is found was compiled

³¹ It need hardly be stated that bardic poems, though orally performed (at least in the first instance) were transmitted in written form.

³² The fourteenth-century notebooks of Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (NLI G2–3) and the patronal *duanaire* known as The Book of Magauran (NLI G1200) are probably the earliest manuscripts to contain bardic poetry now extant. For authorial copies of bardic poems, see Ó Macháin, 'The Early Modern Irish prosodic tracts', 280–5.

³³ [These lines are also cited in BST 66a11, where the editor, Lambert McKenna, mis-read MS *cerd* as *cred*. Note that in a similar couplet from IGT VI we find another form of the verb *do-gheibh* 'finds'.](#)

³⁴ This is, of course, the methodology that lies behind the use of citations in the sixteenth-century grammatical tracts, as discussed above.

with the intention of providing a rounded picture of the poet's oeuvre. If Giolla Brighde's special intimacy was with the Í Ghairmleadhaigh (Williams, p. 3), for example, then the extant corpus, which contains only a single poem in honour of a member of that family (XII), is hardly representative of his professional career.

14 Perhaps more troubling for any assessment of the poet's work is the question of whether we can trust every ascription to Giolla Brighde. Poems of doubtful ascription are briefly discussed by Williams (pp. 10–11), and it is beyond doubt that Giolla Brighde, perhaps because of his great reputation, attracted to himself compositions that were not his. There remains a question-mark over the ascriptions of some poems edited by Williams in the volume that is the subject of these essays. *Ríge C[h]onaire ag Cloinn Néill* (XVI) is ascribed to 'Mac Con Midhe' (no forename) in the sole manuscript witness (The Nugent Manuscript, NLI G992),³⁵ but as it follows another poem attributed to Giolla Brighde, it is not improbable that it is, indeed, the work of our poet. I mentioned above (fn. 12) Williams's doubt concerning *Crann do chuir a-mach Naoi nár* (XXII), which is ascribed to Mac Con Midhe only by a later, non-scribal hand (Charles O'Connor Don?) in the Book of the O'Connor Don, and which Williams (p. 356) holds to be stylistically inferior to poems reliably ascribed to Giolla Brighde.

15 I am very doubtful about the authenticity of the ascription of the famous *A theachtair thig ón Róimh* (XVIII) to Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe. The ascription is found only in two late Ó Longáin manuscripts (and editors familiar with Ó Longáin transcripts of bardic poems will not be re-assured by this provenance);³⁶ in the Book of the O'Connor Don and Stoneyhurst A ii 20 (written c. 1701), the poem is without attribution. I set out in detail my reasons for rejecting this ascription elsewhere,³⁷ but my argument can be summarised as follows: *A theachtair thig ón Róimh* is 'a spirited defence of poets and poetry against the attacks of a certain unnamed cleric, who purports to have Papal documents that demand the abolition of the poetic order in Ireland' (Williams, p. 340). There is no trace whatsoever in any source known to me of a clerical campaign against bardic poetry in the thirteenth century,³⁸ but ample evidence for anti-bardic propaganda (and even synodal legislation

³⁵ Not 'G9922' (Williams, p. 6). The poem begins on fol. 55v (not 54v, as stated by Williams, p. 329).

³⁶ RIA 23 N 15 (mid-eighteenth century) and 23 G 24 (1800–2).

³⁷ Hoyne, 'Uilliam Ó Ceallaigh, Gairm na Nollag 1351 agus stair eacnamaíoch Philíocht na Scol'.

³⁸ Williams (p. 341) refers to the anti-Irish campaign within the Cistercians in the early thirteenth century, but there is no evidence that this was associated with a wider campaign against praise poetry. We have no evidence either of Cistercians practising as praise poets.

against bardic poets) both from native clergy and the church *inter anglicos* in the fourteenth century, a period of bitter economic hardship during which poets and clerics found themselves competing for the greatly reduced disposable wealth of hard-pressed patrons. This financially-motivated persecution formed the backdrop for one of the most picturesque incidents in the history of the Middle ages in Ireland, namely, the great Christmas feast for the poets of Ireland held by Uilliam Ó Ceallaigh in 1351 and celebrated by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh in the beautiful poem *Filidh Éireann go haointeach*, a poem in which reference is made to the difficult situation in which poets found themselves.³⁹ Another poem which, like *A theachtair thig ón Róimh*, defends praise poetry against clerical efforts to suppress the practice is preserved in the Nugent Manuscript and begins *Damhaidh dúinn cóir, a chléirche*.⁴⁰ There it is attributed to none other than our Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, but, as it is addressed to Diarmaid Ó Briain (d. 1364), it must have been composed in the fourteenth century, precisely when we would expect a poem on this topic to be composed. Thankfully, the poem is cited in the grammatical tracts, in one copy of which it is attributed to Maol Muire Mac Craith, a contemporary (and school-friend) of Gofraidh Fionn's.⁴¹ I suspect *A theachtair thig ón Róimh* too was composed in the mid-fourteenth century.

But why should Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe become associated with poems like *A theachtair thig ón Róimh* and *Damhaidh dúinn cóir, a chléirche* if he did not compose them? In his much-quoted *Lá bhraith an Choimdheadh an Chéadaoin*, Giolla Brighde writes:

Moladh daoine dearmad Íosa

a aos dána – dia do ghuais;

gidh cia risa mbeir a bhuidhe

ó Dhia do-gheibh duine a dhuais.

‘To praise people, O men of poetry, is to forget Jesus – danger enough – to whomever a man gives his poetry of thanks, he gets his reward from God.’ (XXI.29)

Williams takes this quatrain to be a renunciation of bardic poetry (p. 352), but I do not think that such an extreme reading is called for. Translate rather ‘To praise men [and] to forget Jesus, O poets – what great danger [to one’s soul]’. The point is not so much that praise-

³⁹ The poem is edited by Knott, ‘*Filidh Éireann go haointeach*’.

⁴⁰ Edited by Ó Cuív, ‘An appeal on behalf of the profession of poetry’.

⁴¹ See Breatnach, ‘Index of names in *Irish Grammatical Tracts*’, 49–50.

poetry is to be avoided but that God, who is the ultimate source for all life's blessings, should also be the subject of panegyric. Here and elsewhere Giolla Brighde gives the impression of having been a genuinely pious man,⁴² and he was clearly conscious of the potentially (if not inherently) immoral nature of praise-poetry. In a poem to Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill (X), Giolla Brighde seeks to defend himself from the charge that he had composed a poem inciting the Í Néill to invade the Í Dhomhnaill.⁴³ To refute the accusations made against him Mac Con Midhe stresses first his own professionalism and then the danger to his eternal soul of lying in verse.

Do chionn cruith do chreacfainn moladh

red mhalaidh duinn, red bhais mbáin;

rigmíd a leas luagh do mholta;

treas ar do ghruadh corcra is cáir.

‘To acquire wealth I would sell praise of [\[better ‘to’\]](#) your brown eyebrow, of your white palm; I need the price of your praise; it is right to take issue with your crimson cheek [better ‘to spend a while praising your crimson cheek’].’ (X.24)

In other words, Mac Con Midhe makes clear that it would be financially unwise for him to alienate a patron like Ó Domhnaill. He then tells Ó Domhnaill the practice of praise-poetry is not to be feared, i.e. that it poses no danger to one's soul, so long as a poem contains no falsehood (25d *an bhréag is í is omhan ann*, ‘the danger is to tell lies’) and that he will not suffer in the next life for anything he has said in his poem to Ó Domhnaill (26d *ní racha pian oram as*, ‘no pain will come upon me from it’⁴⁴). He concludes this line of thought with the following quatrain:

Dála cearda créad fá n-abrar

’gun Athair do ordaigh neamh

dán ar ghné th’earla nó th’aighthe

⁴² Simms, ‘Bardic poems of apology and reconciliation’, 179–80.

⁴³ For more on this poem, see Simms, ‘Bardic poems of apology and reconciliation’, 181–2.

⁴⁴ In *moladh datha do chiabh gclodhdhonn* – / *ní racha pian oram as*, ‘to praise the colour of your brown, wavy hair...’ 26c *clodhdhonn* appears to make *aicill*-rhyme with 26d *oram* in this quatrain, but this must be a corruption as they do not make perfect rhyme.

dá ndearna Sé a aithbhe ar fhear?

‘~~As with a~~Like any craftsman, why would I recite a praise-poem on your hair or your countenance in the presence of the Father, who ordered heaven, if He were going to punish someone for doing it?’ (X.27)

The point Mac Con Midhe is making here (as I have emended the quatrain⁴⁵) is that, ~~like just~~ as a craftsman would not knowingly make a faulty product, he would not knowingly compose a praise-poem that would endanger his soul, i.e. one that contained a falsehood. In other words, his denial of any wrong-doing must be believed, as to compose a false poem would be a sin and Giolla Brighde would not risk his soul in such a manner. The occasion of this poem seeking reconciliation, then, is particular and local and quite different from the national crisis which gave rise to *A theachtair thig ón Róimh* and related polemical poems, but some of the ideas it contains, in particular concerning the moral rectitude of praise-poetry, may have been enough to attract poems in defence of poetry to this well-known and pious author and so give rise to some false ascriptions.⁴⁶ It appears from the citations above that Mac Con Midhe had reconciled his profession to his sincerely-held faith, though one senses some lingering discomfort; the impulse for this examination stemmed – at least on the evidence we have – from personal religious conviction rather than from the challenge of clerical propaganda, and besides a late and unreliable ascription, there is nothing to associate him with *A theachtair*

⁴⁵ Williams follows the manuscript in reading *cearta* (a poorly attested gen. sing. of *ceart*), where I have *cearda* (gen. sing. of *ceard*), and 3 sing. present indicative *abair* for my 1 sing. present subjunctive *abrar*, and translates the quatrain, ‘Why should a poem upon the colour of your hair or your countenance declare that the Father who ordained heaven acted rightly, if He avenges it upon a man?’

⁴⁶ In this connection, I should also mention quatrain 40 of Giolla Brighde’s elaborate elegy on Maol Seachlainn Ó Domhnaill (IV), to which reference will be made again below (§24).

Duine ar a ghrádh do-ghéanadh
dán duine do neimhéaradh;
muna truagh le Dia a déanamh
a dhuan cia nach ceinneághadh?

Williams translates: ‘For the love of him a man would make a poem that another would not refuse; unless God be sorry it was made, who would not buy one of his praise-poems?’ I would translate: ‘For love of him [the dead Maol Seachlainn], no-one would allow a person’s poem to be refused; if God does not disapprove of it being made, who would not pay for the poem in his honour?’ If I have understood it correctly, this quatrain seems to be a not-too-subtle hint that those who have outlived Maol Seachlainn should contribute to the cost of his elaborate eulogy.

thig ón Róimh and much to suggest that that poem was composed as much as a century after his death.

16 Even if we err on the side of caution and count only nineteen of the twenty-two poems edited by Williams's as genuine compositions of Giolla Brighde's, that is still a remarkably high number given that only 105 bardic poems are dated to the thirteenth century, a figure which includes some poems of doubtful date.⁴⁷ Thankfully, it may still be possible to add to the corpus of Giolla Brighde's work. I understand that Gordon Ó Riain will argue in a forthcoming publication that an entire poem not hitherto attributed to Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe is the work of our poet. The grammatical tracts may also have preserved fragments of his work found in no other source. Of the penultimate quatrain of Giolla Brighde's elegy for Brian Ó Néill (XVI), as printed by Williams, only the second half-quatrain survives, and that only because it is cited in *BST*.⁴⁸ In that instance, we know that it belongs to *Aoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain* because *BST* tells us as much, but there are other citations where we may be dealing with now lost poems [by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe](#).⁴⁹

FRAGMENTS OF LOST POEMS [BY GIOLLA BRIGHDE MAC CON MIDHE](#) IN THE GRAMMATICAL TRACTS

17 In *IGT* II §80, which treats of *giolla*, its variant *gille*, and *madra*, the following citation occurs: *Gnímh do gregh mbras gá mbronnadh. ag donnadh bhas ngeal ngilladh*, 'Exercising your swift horses on the occasion of their being given away as gifts reddens the white palms of grooms' (ex. 1610). The context suggests a sort of display in which the recipient of a gift horse is shown the worth of the animal. The palms of the young servants are reddened from gripping the reins over and over again as they exercise horse after horse given away by a generous patron. The citation is marked as faulty, because (for reasons mysterious to me) the bardic grammarians felt that *giolla* (like *duine* and *madra*) should not be allowed a dental genitive plural ending as we find in the paradigm of *céile* (gen. pl. *céile* or *céileadh*). This half-quatrain has not been traced to any extant poem, but in one manuscript of *IGT* II, that found in RIA MS C II 3, it is attributed to 'Gilla Brigde'. Given the fame of our poet, it is unlikely any other individual could have been meant.

⁴⁷ Once again, I base these figures on Katharine Simms's Database.

⁴⁸ See Hoyne, 'Early Modern Irish miscellanea', 179 n. 27.

⁴⁹ For another quatrain on Brian Ó Néill ascribed to Giolla Brighde, found now only in the late sixteenth-century family chronicle known as *An Leabhar Eóghanach*, see Williams, p. 308.

18 In a copy of *IGT* III–IV in TCD H 2.17, we find two citations attributed to ‘Mac Con Midhe’. Again given the high profile of our poet in the bardic academies, this is probably enough to identify the author of these half-quatrains with our Giolla Brighde, but three poems by the fifteenth-century poet Conchobhar Ruadh Mac Con Midhe are also cited in the tracts⁵⁰ and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that he might be the Mac Con Midhe who composed the poems from which these half-quatrains were sourced. Happily, however, the source of one of the citations is known (viz. *Déan oram trócaire, a Thríonóid*) and the poem is ascribed in manuscripts to Giolla Brighde.⁵¹ We are therefore safe in concluding that the other citation is also the work of Giolla Brighde, though its source has not been traced. The half-quatrain in question occurs in *IGT* III §7, which deals with the substantive verb: *A ngael gé beith ar a mbél. gan beith ar-aen ar aensgél*, which we might render ‘Though they protest their affection for one another, they are not in agreement’ (ex. 101). This citation was most likely included to illustrate present subjunctive *beith*, which makes perfect rhyme with the verbal noun *beith*. The paradigm of the substantive verb given in the tract itself has no word on this form and gives only rel. *beas* and *raibh*, the second of which has a number of variants. Despite the absence of *beith* from the paradigm, the citation itself is marked as correct.⁵² The point may perhaps be that exceptionally, while *beas* and *raibh* are the standard forms of the present subjunctive in relative position (and in Classical Modern Irish the subjunctive only occurs in relative clauses or after conjunctions), after *gé* the old absolute form *beith* is ~~still~~ allowed-used in place of the relative. This would involve no contradiction as the forms *beas* and *raibh* are introduced (as normal with subjunctive forms) after *gé chuin* ‘whenever’ (*gé chuin bheas* etc.) rather than after *gé* alone.⁵³

⁵⁰ For details, see fn. 12 above.

⁵¹ The citation is discussed in §6 above.

⁵² Irritatingly, Bergin often silently omits the .c. ‘correct’ that follows so many citations in the tracts. A later scribe has added (on the basis of this very citation?) *gé bheith* towards the end of the paradigm of the substantive verb in RIA E iv 1 with the gloss .c. *do chanamhain* ‘correct as an anomalous form’. Bergin prints .g. after this gloss (which could stand for *gaoidhealg* ‘past habitual’) but I doubt this belongs here; in form and function *gé bheith* is certainly subjunctive. Cf. Hoyne, ‘*Seacht bpearsain fhichead uair mé*’, 113, where the significance of the gloss in E iv 1 and the specificity of the example *gé bheith* is missed.

⁵³ The absolute form of the verb is usual after Old Irish *cía* (> Classical Modern Irish *gé*) ‘although, even if’, and we might wonder whether we have here another example of an older linguistic feature surviving in Giolla Brighde’s work or of his linguistic conservatism (see §7 above), but *gé bheith* is also found in the work of later poets. See, for example, metrically-confirmed instances in McKenna, *Aithdioghluim Dána*, poem 28.11, and Knott, *Tadhg Dall*, poem 10.17. *gé bheas is not attested.

METRICAL VARIATION

19 To give some flavour of metrical variation in the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, we will investigate one example each at the level of the whole corpus (§§20–4), at the level of a poem (§25) and finally at the level of the quatrain (§§33–6).

The choice of metre

20 The following table represents the range of metres found in the volume edited by Williams. The second column shows the figures for all twenty-two poems edited by Williams; the first figure is the total number of poems written in a particular metre, followed in brackets by the percentage of the corpus in question that this metre makes up. The third column excludes three poems about the authorship of which there is some doubt. The fourth column gives figures for the corpus of poems marked as thirteenth century in Katharine Simms’s Bardic Poetry Database, excluding the twenty-two poems edited by Williams (here denoted by ‘GBMCM’). The fourth column gives the relevant information for the whole corpus of bardic poetry (thirteenth to seventeenth century) as indexed on Katharine Simms’s Database. For clarity, I distinguish between two forms of the metre *deibhidhe*.⁵⁴

| | Poems I–XXII | Excluding XVI, XVIII, XXII | Rough % of C13 corpus excluding GBMCM | Rough % of total corpus excluding GBMCM |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| deibide sgaoilte | 13 (59%) | 10 (53%) | 46 (55%) | 1004 (52%) |
| deibide imrinn | 1 (4.5%) | 1 (5%) | 1 (>1%) | 2 (>1%) |
| séadnaoidh | 7 (32%) | 7 (37%) | 11 (13%) | 180 (9%) |
| rannaigheacht bheag | 1 (4.5%) | 1 (5%) | 3 (4.6%) | 134 (7%) |
| TOTAL | 22 | 19 | 83 | 1935 |

⁵⁴ The Classical Modern Irish terms continue the Middle Irish labels for these metres (see Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics*, 65, 69, and *IGT* V §§85 and 86).

21 In attempting to assess what significance, if any, there may be in this distribution of metres we must first ask how much choice Mac Con Midhe had in selecting a particular metre for a particular poem. Occasionally, the metre may have been pre-determined. In setting out to echo a Middle Irish poem of the same incipit (*Conall cuingidh cloinne Néill*),⁵⁵ for example, Giolla Brighde's hands were tied (Poem III): he had to begin with a heptasyllabic line ending in a monosyllable. He might have composed in *rannaigheacht mhór*, but unsurprisingly he opted for the ubiquitous *deibhidhe*, the metre in which the earlier poem was composed. But what about instances where such restrictions did not apply? Might the choice of metre have related to the subject matter of a given poem?⁵⁶

22 In a poem by Cellach Úa Rúanada (d. 1079), a rather vague link is made between particular metres and certain subjects: *deibide scaílte* is described as the metre proper for narrative, while *rannaigecht mór* and *casbairdne* are associated with praise, and *rannaigecht bec* is not to be used with satire.⁵⁷ This at least raises the possibility of a functional distribution of metres. No obvious connection between metre and subject emerges from a study of Giolla Brighde's oeuvre. As it seems he had a certain penchant for *séadnaoidh* – it makes up a much larger percentage of his work than of the corpus of bardic poetry as a whole⁵⁸ – it may be worth investigating whether this was personal taste or whether his poems in *séadnaoidh* [are](#) associated with particular themes. I cannot identify any common thread associated with Giolla Brighde's *séadnaoidh* poems and with no other metre; it seems to me that there is nothing in their subject matter that would preclude their being written in *deibhidhe*. Poem I is a praise-poem for Domhnall Mór Ó Domhnaill which urges the Í Néill to submit to the Í Dhomhnaill; Poem V is a poem for Gofraidh Ó Domhnaill in praise of his residence at Inis Saimhéar; Poem VI is in praise of Aodh Ó Domhnaill, who is presented as Ireland's saviour; Poem VII is an inaugural ode for Domhnall Óg Ó Domhnaill, and in Poem

⁵⁵ Simms, 'The Donegal poems in the Book of Fenagh', 42.

⁵⁶ I am grateful to Dr Marie-Luise Theuerkauf, who posed this question to me in the discussion following the ITS seminar.

⁵⁷ Breatnach, '*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti in dána*', 72.

⁵⁸ The earliest form of the name of this metre is *sétnad* (< *sét* 'object of value' + *nath* 'poem'), a *u*-stem, but the form *séadnaoidh* (: *céadlaoidh*), with gen. *séadnaoidhe*, is given in *IGT* II §13. This form may have arisen through contamination with *laoidh*, as suggested to me by Liam Breatnach. The older *sétnad* must have survived alongside this new form, as it underlies later *séadna*, which is found in Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn's seventeenth-century prosodic tract (Mac Aogáin, *Graiméir Ghaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr*, 133).

X, Giolla Brighde denies having composed a poem that undermined the same Domhnall Óg; Poem XIX is Giolla Brighde's moving poem to God on the death of his children, and Poem XXI is another religious composition, on Holy Week. In Poem XIX, which is profoundly personal, Giolla Brighde most likely had free rein as to which metre he would use, but in the case of formal poems for his benefactors, it may be that the individuals giving the commission requested a particular metre.⁵⁹

23 All of the poems which can safely be attributed to Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe fulfil the requirements of strict *dán díreach*. We might wonder whether Giolla Brighde ever composed in loose *ógláchas*. He may well have on informal occasions (in correspondence with another poet, for example), but such poems would not have been studied in the bardic schools: their metrical looseness made them a barren hunting ground for metrically-mixed forms and constructions and these poems would, therefore, have had a reduced chance of survival compared to metrically perfect compositions.

24 If no metrically loose compositions by Giolla Brighde survive, his *Do shlán uaim, a Áth Seanaigh* (IV) must stand near the pinnacle of metrical elaboration possible. Along with an early thirteenth-century poem attributed to one Aonghus Ó Dálaigh⁶⁰ and a poem composed by Tuathal Ó hUiginn c. 1400,⁶¹ this is one of only three known examples of *deibhidhe imrinn* in the entire corpus of Classical Modern Irish poetry, though a number of quatrains from now lost poems are also cited in the tracts.⁶² In this highly ornate metre, the poet must fulfil all the metrical requirements of the common metre *deibhidhe sgaoilte*, but whereas in

⁵⁹ Unusually, in two eighteenth-century copies of Poem XIX, both made by Muiris Ó Gormáin, the heading specifies the metre: *Ag so dán séadna, Giolla Brighde Mac Con M(h)idhe .cc.*, 'This is a poem in *séadna*, Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe cecenit' (Williams, p. 344). The manuscripts in question are TCD H 4.5 (the siglum used by Williams is 'L') and Egerton 127 ('g', though this is printed 'G' by mistake on its first mention on p. 344). The context helps explain this unusual heading: both manuscripts contain an English-language translation of Froinsias Ó Maolmhuaidh's metrical primer (published as part of his *Grammatica Latino-Hibernica* in 1677), to which the texts of poems illustrating particular metres have been added. Even at this late stage in the native study of Irish poetry, Giolla Brighde occupies a special place in the canon. One might even wonder if the prominence of *séadnaoidh* in the surviving corpus has to do with Mac Con Midhe's reputation as a master of that metrical form.

⁶⁰ Edited in Ó Raghallaigh, 'Táinig léan do Leith Mhogha'.

⁶¹ McKenna, *Aithdioghluim Dána*, poem 7.

⁶² For *deibhidhe imrinn* and the known examples, see the discussion in Ó Raghallaigh, 'Táinig léan do leith Mhogha', 130–1.

standard *deibhidhe* the final word of line *a* rhymes only with the final word of line *b* and the final word of line *c* rhymes only with the final of line *d*, in *deibhidhe imrinn* the final of line *a* must also rhyme with the final of *c* and the final of line *b* with the final of line *d*. Giolla Brighde adds a further level of complexity not found in the poems in this metre composed by Aonghus Ó Dálaigh or Tuathal Ó hUiginn or any of the four discreet quatrains of *deibhidhe imrinn* cited in the tracts: in his *Do shlán uaim, a Áth Seanaigh*, every stressed words in line *b* (except the final) rhymes with a stressed word in the interior of line *a*; in other words, in addition to the usual internal rhyme found in the second couplet of a quatrain in *deibhidhe* metre, Mac Con Midhe adds internal rhyme in the first couplet.⁶³

I cite the first quatrain of the poem to illustrate its metrical intricacy. The syllable pattern is 7²7³7²7³. The end-rhyme between *a* and *b* and between *c* and *d* is of the heterosyllabic *rinn* : *airdrinn* variety characteristic of the metre *deibhidhe*. All of the words making end-rhyme are printed in roman font; the additional homosyllabic end-rhyme rhyme between *a* and *c* and between *b* and *d* is marked in bold. Internal rhymes are indicated with small capitals. *Uaim* (loosely translated ‘alliteration’) is marked by °. The stressed words that perform no metrical function besides contributing to the syllable-count are underlined. Even this latter category is associated with metrical complexity, for, as we will see (§33), there are particular rules governing their position.

Do shlán °UAIM, a °ÁTH Seanaigh;
do-chUAIDH °CÁCH id °chlaoindeabhaidh;
tárras ORT °MEING is °meabhail;
OLC do °ghREIM do °Ghaoidhealaibh.

‘I accuse you, O Áth Seanaigh; everyone has died in your unequal combat; one met guile and shame upon you; poor your profit to the Irish’ (IV.1)⁶⁴

⁶³ The use of internal rhyme in this metre may perhaps reflect Mac Con Midhe’s familiarity with earlier metrical norms. Cf. fn. 2 above. In two Middle Irish examples of *deibide n-imrinn*, we find only one internal rhyme in the first couplet, leaving an additional stressed word in line *b* that does not make internal rhyme (Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics*, 69; Breatnach, ‘*Sluindfet dúib daghaisti in dána*’, 83).

⁶⁴ Better, ‘I accuse you, Áth Seanaigh; everyone who has taken part in the rigged fight for you has died; for your sake one has earned [nought but] perfidy and disgrace; possessing you ends badly for Irishmen’. For the acc. after the autonomous verb here (*meing*, *meabhail*) in place of the more usual nom. (*meang*, *meabhal*), see Hoyne, *Fuidheall Áir*, 396–7.

Composing in such an elaborate metre must have been extraordinarily difficult, and, indeed, there are some indications that even Giolla Brighde chafed somewhat in this particular straight-jacket (see §36 below). But why compose such an elaborate poem at all? *Do shlán uaim, a Áth Seanaigh* is an elegy for Maoil Eachlainn Ó Domhnaill (d. 1241), king of Tír Chonaill, but this hardly explains why the poem is written in elaborate *deibhidhe imrinn* as opposed to the less demanding *deibhidhe sgaoilte*. Other elegies, including that for Brian Ó Néill, are in bog standard *deibhidhe sgaoilte*. The circumstances may not be recoverable. It is possible that those who survived Maol Eachlainn desired a particularly artful elegy.

Presumably, if there was some relationship between metrical complexity and the price paid for a poem, as seems likely, such an intricate elegy was more pricey and therefore more prestigious. Perhaps this explains the rather jarring quatrain which I translate in footnote 44 above: if my interpretation of these lines is correct, they read rather like an appeal for contributions on the part of those who commissioned the poem for help paying off the elegy.

Dúnadh

25 To complete a bardic poem, a poet would compose the final line of the final quatrain of the poem in such a way that it reflected the beginning of the poem. *Dúnadh* or ‘closure’ might involve the repetition of a whole line, a word, a syllable or merely a letter or two.⁶⁵ The *dúnadh* could also be used to mark the end of [the main body of a poem and the addition of supplementary quatrains \(an envoi to the honorand’s spouse, an address to God or the saints or to the poet’s permanent patron\) or even \(though only on rare occasions\) the division of a poem into sections](#)~~a particular section of a poem and so; as a result~~ a single poem can have multiple *dúnta*.⁶⁶ As an example of variation at the level of the poem, we will examine the multiple *dúnta* of the long elegy for Brian Ó Néill and his allies (XIII).

26 The poem begins *Aoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain*. Gordon Ó Riain has suggested to me that (*pace* Williams) the first word of this poem is not a variant of *óidh*, *úidh* (earlier *óid*, *uíd*) but the word meaning ‘stranger, visitor, guest’ (earlier *óigie*). I take it then that the first half-quatrain *Aoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain / i gcrích ainiúil fa fhuairchriaidh* should be rendered ‘Brian’s head in a foreign land beneath cold clay is an exile beloved of my heart’. The main body of the poem (that concerned directly with Brian Ó Néill) concludes at

⁶⁵ See Ní Dhomhnaill, ‘Closure in bardic poetry’.

⁶⁶ Occasionally, the additional quatrains after a *dúnadh* are not the work of the original author but later additions, and these additional quatrains may also be rounded off with a *dúnadh* (see Hoyne, *Fuidheall Áir*, 269 n. 214).

quatrain 56 with the line *ceann Í Néill ionmhain aoidhe*, which I would translate ‘the head of Ó Néill is a beloved stranger’, with poetic inversion of the adjective *ionmhain* and the noun it qualifies.⁶⁷ This is clearly a repetition of the opening word of the poem.

27 The following three quatrains are concerned with reckoning the years between Christ’s birth (quatrains 57 and 58) and the Battle of Caimeirghe (quatrain 59) and Ó Néill’s death. This section concludes *go dol í Néill Naoighialloigh* ‘until the death of the descendant of Niall Naoighiallach’. Here the final syllable of *Naoighialloigh* recalls the first syllable *Aoidhe*. The link is not immediately obvious: <aoi> and <oi> do not sound remotely similar and <gh> and <dh> are also quite distinct. Firstly, ~~it must be stated that in my opinion at least~~, the *dúnadh* is frequently a purely visual device. If we restore an older spelling of *aoidhe*, namely *aíghe*,⁶⁸ and read *Naoighiallaigh* (the spelling of the final unstressed vowel is subject to variation) the poem begins <aíg> and ends <aigh>; the fact that in the former we have a long vowel (historically a diphthong) and in the latter an unstressed vowel is of no consequence, once the visual link is clear. The next section concerns other magnates who fell at the Battle of Downpatrick in 1260. This concludes at line 77d with the surname Ó *Gairmleadhaigh*, where we have a *dúnadh* similar to that at quatrain 59. Quatrains 78 and 79 are apparently later interpolations but even here a *dúnadh* has been supplied: quatrain 79 ends with the surname Ó *Flaitheartaigh*.

28 Quatrain 80, of which only the second couplet now survives, was clearly an address to God added on as an *iargcomharc* or supplementary quatrain. It reads: *treise, a Dhé mhóir, ar Mhoire / go mbé ’gun óigh m’athloighe*, translated by McKenna as ‘may my repose with the Virgin have ever more influence on Mary, O great God’. We know that this belongs to our poem because *BST* 221.29–30, where this half-quatrain is cited, tells us that the poem from which this citation was taken began *Áoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain*. These lines are cited in *BST* to illustrate *aoi trasgartha* ‘vanquished <aoi> (or <ai>)’, and to understand how the second syllable of *athloighe* could make closure with *Aoidhe*, a brief definition of this phenomenon is required.⁶⁹ In the course of the Early Modern Irish period, a more phonetic spelling of words like *troigh* ‘foot’ (earlier *traig*), *coill* ‘wood’ (earlier *caill*) established

⁶⁷ Such inversion is no longer common in Classical Modern Irish, but for examples of preposed adjectives qualifying nouns in the genitive, see McManus, ‘Surnames and scions’, 127, and Hoyne, *Fuidheall Áir*, 358–9.

⁶⁸ This is the spelling in *IGT* II §21.

⁶⁹ I have discussed this issue in detail elsewhere (Hoyne, ‘Early Modern Irish miscellanea’, 178–83). For a correction to my translation on p. 179 of that paper, see McManus, ‘Celebrating the canine II’, 151.

itself. These words had undergone a vowel-shift *ai* > *oi* in the Middle Irish period but were nonetheless still spelt with historical <ai> well into the fifteenth century. Though spelt with <ai> they would rhyme as pronounced (*Ailill* : *sobhind*, later *Oilill* : *soibhinn*). In addition, by the sixteenth century the graph-sequence <aoi> had begun to supplant earlier <aí> in words like *sgaoilidh* (earlier *scaílid*). It is these orthographical changes that are described by the term *aoi* (or *ai*) *trasgartha* in the tracts. When the spelling system changed, bardic prosodists discovered that some metrical features of the poetry of the old masters like Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe were no longer obvious. They adapted by addressing these problems in the tract. In the half-quatrain *treise, a Dhé mhóir, ar Mhoire / go mbé 'gun óigh m'athloighe*, the word *athloighe* is a compound of *ath-* and *loighe* 'lying', earlier *laighe* (< *laige*, *lige*). We have already seen that an earlier spelling of *aidhe* is *aíghe*. By making these two modifications, namely reading *athlaighe* and *aíghe*, we have a visual link between the end of this half-quatrain and the beginning of our poem. It is important to emphasise again that this is a purely visual link. The grammatical tracts do not allow *laighe* as a variant form of the noun in question;⁷⁰ they only allow that, for certain purposes, it can be treated as if it were spelt *laighe*, as indeed it must have been in Giolla Brighde's time.

29 The final quatrain of the poem (81) is an *iargcomharc* to St Brigit, after whom Giolla Brighde was, of course, named. It ends with a request (*go dtí dom fhios an t-aidhe* 'may she come as a guest to visit me') and the final word of this couplet is again a repetition of the first word of the poem.

30 I have identified multiple *dúnta* in three other poems in this volume. Poem IX offers a particularly striking example of the use of a *dúnadh* to define the constituent sections of a poem. The poem begins *Ceathrar is fhéile fuair Flann* 'The four most generous men whom Flann found', and the first 28 quatrains are devoted to a re-telling of a poem ascribed (probably falsely) to Flann mac Lonáin (d. 896 or 918).⁷¹ Quatrain 28 closes with a repetition of the opening word of the poem (*don cheathrar*), and in quatrain 29 Mac Con Midhe changes tack and offers a sort of update to pseudo-Flann mac Lonáin's earlier poem, beginning *Ceathrar is fhearr fuaras féin* 'The four best that I found myself'. The poem concludes at quatrain 39 with the word *comairce*, the final *-ce* of which makes a *dúnadh* with the incipit of the poem and with the beginning of its second section. This poem offers another

⁷⁰ The forms allowed are *loighe*, *luighe* and *lighe* (IGT II §2 and III §74).

⁷¹ For an edition of the poem itself with discussion of authorship, see Dobbs, 'A poem ascribed to Flann mac Lonáin'. See also Simms, 'The Donegal poems in the Book of Fenagh', 40–2 and fn. 731 below.

striking example of Giolla Brighde's engagement with earlier source material,⁷² for the poem *Ard do scéla a meic na cúach*, which almost certainly forms the basis of the first 238 quatrains, is also bipartite, with the shift between its two sections marked by a *dúnadh*, as noted by Williams (p. 295).⁷³

31 The use of a double *dúnadh* in *Ceathrar is fhéile fuair Flann* creates a diptych which brings together contemporary Í Dhomhnaill honorands and distinguished figures from their history; it is also a powerful reminder to those contemporary patrons of the enduring nature of praise-poetry. The use of *dúnta* in the two other poems is more akin to the *dúnta* after supplementary quatrains in *Aoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain*, but, as we will see, even such apparently humdrum use of *dúnta* can occasion an unexpected flash of artistic genius. The main body of Giolla Brighde's poem in praise of the cathedral at Armagh (XVIII) concludes with a repetition of the first word of the poem (*ceannphort* 'capital'), and this is followed by four quatrains on other Patrician ecclesiastical sites (quatrains 44–7), each of which is also furnished with a *dúnadh*: the first supplementary quatrain ends on gen. pl. *ceannphort* (quatrain 44); the next two end in the syllable *-ceann* (*foirceann* 'end', ... *nochan fhaiceann* 'does not see'); and the final quatrain ends on *-ce* (*cumairce*) (cf. the final *dúnadh* of *Ceathrar is fhéile fuair Flann*, discussed in the previous paragraph). Giolla Brighde's poem on the death of his children has three *dúnta*: the first at the end of the main body of the poem (quatrain 27), the second after a supplementary address to the Virgin Mary (quatrain 28), and the third after a final supplication to St Brigit (quatrain 29). The *dúnadh* in all cases is *Dé*, either vocative (*a Dhé*) or genitive. This not only forms a satisfactory *dúnadh* with the first line of the poem *Déan oram trócaire, a Thríonóid* 'Have mercy upon me, O Trinity', but the three-fold repetition of *Dé* recalls the Trinity invoked in the first line.

32 In brief, I detect the following patterns of *dúnadh* in the other poems in this volume, that is, those with only one *dúnadh*:⁷⁴

⁷² See fn. 254 above.

⁷³ In *Ard na scéla, a meic na cúach*, both *dúnta* link up with the first line of the poem (55d *an doman dronard*, 64d *go comhard*). Unlike in Giolla Brighde's re-telling, there is no internal *dúnadh* in the second section, which begins *Gormlaith*. Margaret Dobbs was of the opinion that the second section of the poem might be as late as the fifteenth century ('A poem ascribed to Flann mac Lonáin', 17), but the fact that Giolla Brighde's poem has a bipartite structure might support Simms's contention ('The Donegal poems in the Book of Fenagh', 40–2) that Giolla Brighde was probably working from *Ard na scéla, a meic na cúach* as we now have it rather than a lost earlier version of the poem, as implied by Dobbs.

- (a) repetition at the end of the poem of the initial word uncompounded or an accepted variant of the initial word: VIII *ragha*, beg. *Rogha*; X *tug*, beg. *Tug*; XV *iongnadh*, beg. *Iongnadh*.
- (b) repetition of the initial word compounded, ignoring lenition: XXII* *ar chruadhchrann*, beg. *Crann*.
- (c) *dúnadh* of one syllable at the end of the poem, ignoring lenition and vowel quantity and glide-vowels where necessary: I *cháidh*, beg. *Caidhead*;⁷⁵ III *onchon*, beg. *Conoll*; XI *do lomaírg* (*do airg* ‘plundered’ with *lom-* ‘completely’), beg. *Mairg* ‘woe’; XIV *leacht... saorChathail... Chroibhdheirg*, beg. *Dearmhad* (= *Dermhad*, with alternative spelling); XX *cairdeas*, beg. *Deasgaidh*.
- (d) *dúnadh* of two syllables at the end of the poem linking to two syllables at the beginning of the poem, ignoring glide-vowels where necessary: II *céidteasta* (*teasta* is the gen. of *teist* ‘fame’), beg. *Teasta* ‘has died’; IV *fa Inbhear nDulán*, beg. *Do shlán* (= *Du lán*, with alternative spelling); XVIII* *aitheach*, beg. *A theachtair*.
- (e) *dúnadh* formed across a word boundary at the end of the poem, ignoring lenition and vowel quantity when necessary: V *ionnraic é*, beg. *Céidtreabh*; VI *ar fhearthain í*, beg. *Táinig*; VII *do luing fhada í*, beg. *Do-fhidir* (= *Da-idir*, with alternative spelling); XXI *ar n-aoibheall ab*, beg. *Lá bhraith an Choimheadh*.⁷⁶

The *urlann* space

33 We have so far examined metrical variation at the level of the corpus (the choice of metre) and within a poem (multiple *dúnta*) as a small contribution to understanding the art of bardic poetry as practised by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe. We will now examine variation at the level of the quatrain and half-quatrain, namely in the use of the *urlann* space. In a half-quatrain that requires internal rhymes, we expect every stressed word in the second line not

⁷⁴ In the figures below, I mark poems of doubtful ascription with an asterisk and mark in bold where the link may not be immediately obvious. ~~Three~~ poems are not included: the final line of Poem XII is not deciphered and the end of Poem XVI* and probably also of Poem XIV is wanting. Poem XIV as extant finishes on the word *Chroibhdheirg*, but the final <g> means that it cannot form a proper *dúnadh* with the first word of the poem (*Dearmhad*).

⁷⁵ *Caidhe* ‘what?’ + 3 pl. suffix (see *DIL* s.v. *cote*). ~~I have no other example of this form in Classical Modern Irish.~~ Cf. Old Irish *cateet*, *cateat*, *catiat*, and note also *caidid* (: *mairid*) in *A Bardic Miscellany*, poem 383.14cd.

⁷⁶ It may perhaps be reading too much into the patterns above to note that (b) occurs only in a poem of doubtful ascription.

participating in end-rhyme (or *aicill*-rhyme with the final of the preceding line) to make internal rhyme with a stressed words s in the interior of the preceding line. If a stressed word in the first line of such a half-quatrain does not have a rhyming partner in the second line, it should occur at the beginning of the line,⁷⁷ i.e. in *urlann* position. To illustrate this, we will look again at two quatrains in *séadnaoidh* metre cited earlier (§15 above).

Moladh daoine dearmad Íosa

a aos dána – dia do ghuais;

gidh CIA risa MBEIR a bhuidhe

ó DHIA do-GHEIBH duine a dhuais.

In this metre, internal rhymes (shown in small capitals) are only found in the second half-quatrain. Every stressed word in line *d* that is not involved in end-rhyme (*dhuais* rhymes with *ghuais* in line *b*) or *aicill* (*duine* rhymes with *bhuidhe* in line *c*) has its rhyming partner. The only words left over in either line are unstressed, and these cannot participate in rhyme. In another quatrain in the same metre, however, we find that the first stressed word in line *c* (rigmíd) has no rhyming partner in line *d*; *rigmíd* is an *urlann*.

Do chionn cruaidh do chreacfainn moladh

red mhalaidh duinn, red bhais mbáin;

rigmíd a LEAS LUAGH do mholta;

TREAS ar do GHRUADH corcra is cáir.

34 The u*Urlann* has recently been the subject of a detailed examination by Damian McManus.⁷⁸ In that paper, McManus shows, among other things, that two words are sometimes found in *urlann* position, though this is rare. Among his examples of double *urlann* in *séadnaoidh* metre are three quatrains (of which two are from a single poem) by our poet; in all other quatrains in this metre, Mac Con Midhe has either a single *urlann* word or no *urlann* at all.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ An *urlann* word can be preceded by an unstressed word or words.

⁷⁸ ‘On the use of the *urlann*’.

⁷⁹ McManus, ‘On the use of the *urlann*’, 76. The quatrains in question are V.22, VI.6 and VI.25. In the case of V.22 and VI.6, it may be worth noting that the double *urlann* allows for clear parallelism between the two half-

35 As McManus notes, the double *urlann* is rare in *deibhidhe*, but though few and far between examples are found at all periods of bardic poetry. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Giolla Brighde could have availed of the double *urlann* license in this metre had he wished to do so, but in the thirteen examples of *deibhidhe sgaoilte* in this volume there is not one instance of this phenomenon. McManus points out that the presence of a single *urlann* does not seem to have been regarded as any sort of blemish on a quatrain,⁸⁰ ~~but the~~ fact that a double *urlann* is so often avoided may suggest that it was, if not a fault, something best avoided, or perhaps simply that it was difficult to produce or superfluous to requirements.

36 There is, however, a poem in *deibhidhe* by Giolla Brighde in which a number of double *urlann* occur, namely, his metrical tour de force in *deibhidhe imrinn* beginning *Do shlán uaim a Áth Seanaigh* (IV), a poem in which Mac Con Midhe has internal rhymes in both couplets. I have noticed seven examples of double *urlann*, all in the first couplet of their respective ~~half-~~quatrains (quatrains 6, 23, 24, 25, 30, 32 and 42). To explain this concentration of double *urlann*, we might recall that the additional requirement of internal rhyme in the first couplet may well have been self-imposed, and one could argue therefore that Giolla Brighde allowed himself more flexibility than usual with *urlann* in *deibhidhe*. It might also be an indication that even this maestro was not entirely comfortable composing in such a demanding metre. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of quatrains 6, 23, 24, 30 and 32, there is obvious parallelism and additional rhyme (marked here in bold) as a result of the repetition of certain words (a metrical feature known as *breacadh*). The *urlann* words in quatrain 6 are *Caol Uisge* and the word *caol* (better capitalised as *An Caol*?) occurs again in the second half-quatrain.

***Caol** Uisge fa hadhbha long,*

nochar ghardha do ghormGholl;

*an **caol** nír chonair do Gholl*

*ag **Maol** Doraidh 's ag Domhnoll.*

quatrains. In V.22, the first half-quatrain begins *Is iad na dairghe...* and the second begins *Is iad Clann Chuinn...* This also gives the quatrain an additional layer of superfluous rhyme between the four occurrences of (s)iad. In VI.6, we have *Is tusa ro thairngir Bearchán* and *Tú do gheall béal Colaim Chille*. There is no such parallelism in VI.25, however.

⁸⁰ 'On the use of the *urlann*', 69.

‘Caol Uisge, that was a residence for ships, used to be no garden for the Foreigner in his blue-grey armour; the narrow water was no path for the Foreigner when it belonged to Maol Doraidh and Domhnall.’

In quatrain 23, *Maol mar Mhaol* in the line *Maol mar Mhaol Eachlainn oile* ‘Maol was like another Maol Eachlainn’ is a double *urlann*, but the word *Maol* (co-referential with the *Maol* of the first line) occurs again in the second couplet. In quatrain 24, we have *Loch Gile* as a double *urlann* and *Loch* occurs again twice in the second couplet (in different place-names). In quatrain 30, the double *urlann* is *Trí Colla* and there is *breacadh* with *trí* in the next couplet (as well as purely semantic parallelism with *triar fial*). In quatrain 32, we have parallelism and a triple internal rhyme on *cath* in the final line echoing the plural *catha* of the *urlann*:

Trí catha ón dubhaigh daoine,

Ulaídh agá n-éagcaoine:

cath Muighe Rath, cath Craoibhe

agus cath na Céadaoine.

‘The Ulaídh are lamenting the three battles that make people miserable: the battle of Magh Rath, the battle of Craobh and the battle of Wednesday.’⁸¹

In quatrains 25 and 42, however, I can detect no parallelism or additional metrical ornamentation to justify or compensate for the double *urlann*.

Mé is mo reacht choidhche fam choim –

is doirche ná gach doghroinn –

beag ar Ghall nDealgan mo dhoir

dá deargadh ar Ó nDomhnoill.

⁸¹ For the plural predicative adjective *dubhaigh*, see now McManus ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, 386–7. A study of Giolla Brighde’s use of parallelism, repetition and the poorly-understood metrical and stylistic ornament called *breacadh* would be a worthwhile undertaking. Tomás Ó Máille’s confusing study *Breacadh* does little to clarify what *breacadh* involves and how it operates.

‘I am with anger forever in my breast, that is being aroused for Ó Domhnaill – it is grimmer than any affliction – little do the Foreigners of Dealga care for my grief.’

Tug bás Maoil Eachlainn uire

gan chraoibh gcleachtchuill gcnóbhuidhe;

samhradh ’na dhiaidh is duibhe

ná ar marbhadh Briain Bhóruimhe.

‘Maol Seachlainn’s death has weighed upon us in that there is no thickly-growing branch of hazel that is tawny with nuts; after his death summer is gloomier than after the slaying of Brian Bóroimhe.’⁸²

LINGUISTIC VARIATION

37 Though Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe was a native of modern-day Co. Tyrone, the language we encounter in his poetry is the literary medium cultivated for poetry; it was not his ‘native’ language, but an idiom he would have learnt as part of his training as a hereditary praise-poet. The grammatical tracts provide evidence of an enormous amount of variant forms: as I pointed out above (§6), following the relevant section of the grammatical tracts, a poet like Giolla Brighde had at least seven forms of the synthetic 2 sing. past tense of the verb *do-ní* ‘makes, does’ at his disposal in composing a poem: *do-rinnis*, *do-roinnis*, *do-rínis*, *do-righnis*, *do-roighnis*, *do-rónais* and *do-róinis*. He could also avail of the analytic form of any of these, a liberty that doubled the number of possibilities: *do-rinne tú*, *do-roinne tú*, etc. That Giolla Brighde chose *do-róinis* to rhyme with *do fhóiris* in quatrain 17 of the poem *Déan oram trócaire, a Thríonóid* (XIX) did not prevent him from availing of these other forms elsewhere. In quatrain 14, we read

⁸² Better to take the first line as *Tug bás Maoil Eachlainn Uire*, ‘The death of Maol Eachlainn of Uire has caused...’ *Uire* is not an attested variant of *eire/oire* ‘burden’, but P.A. Breatnach’s suggestion (‘Review’, 417) that we read *uirre* (presumably 3 sing. fem. conjugated preposition) will not do, as *uirre* will not make perfect rhyme with *-bhuidhe* (or *duibhe* etc.) (see Mac Cárthaigh, ‘Cathain a dhéanfaidh consan teann comhardadh slán le consan éadrom?’). Cf. the place-name *Sliabh Uire*, which appears to be a variant of *Sliabh Fuire* in Galway. It occurs in the dative in XVI.13, though this might represent either *a Sléibh Uire* or *a Sléibh [Fh]uire* (see §10 above).

buaidh gcloinne ar fhear do budh usa –

neamh do-roinne tusa ar tús

‘the ability to produce children would be easier for someone – you made heaven first’⁸³

In this instance we have the analytical form with the pronoun *tusa* (*tú* + *nota augens*). *Do-roinne tusa* gives us the required syllables in the second line (seven after the obligatory elision of *ar*), it provides alliteration (between *tús* and *tusa*), an internal rhyme (*do-roinne* with *cloinne*) and *aicill* (*tusa* and *usa*). In quatrain 16, we have

Eabha as a thaoibh réidh do-roighnis

Do bhéin, a Shaoir choimhdheis cháich

‘**Y**ou made, O expert craftsman of all, Eve by plucking her from his [Adam’s] smooth side’

Now the form Giolla Brighde uses is *do-roighnis*. This gives the correct syllable count (eight syllables after the obligatory elision of *a*, two syllables of which must be in a single stressed word at the end of the line),⁸⁴ alliteration (with *réidh*) and *aicill* with *coimhdheis*. The point here is that the choice of form is conditioned by the metrical environment: the use of one form rather than another in a given quatrain reveals nothing about Mac Con Midhe’s vernacular.⁸⁵

⁸³ Better ‘[to bestow] the gift [or ‘the best’] of children on a man would be ~~most~~ easiery [for you, given that you created Heaven initially [i.e. before anything else existed]’.

⁸⁴ The preverb *do-* is unstressed and so *do-roighnis* counts as a disyllabic word for metrical purposes. The preverb is still counted in determining the total syllable-count of the line.

⁸⁵ In this instance, the tracts register the three variant forms used by Giolla Brighde, but not all of the variation found in his poetry is captured in the tracts. I know of no discussion in the tracts of the interjection *uch* ‘alas!’, which can also be used a noun (‘groan, sigh’). In *Aoidhe mo chroidhe ceann Briain*, Giolla Brighde uses three forms – *ach*, *och* and *uch*, all confirmed by rhyme (with *cath*, *loch* and *guth* respectively) (XIII.29, 44, 64). Another interesting linguistic feature not captured by the tracts to my knowledge is the variation in the personal name *Maol* (*Seachlainn*). *Maol* is a masculine noun in Classical Modern Irish, but in the earlier language it was feminine (e.g. *Fergal mac Maíle Dúin*). Traces of the earlier gender survive in personal names like *Maol Seachlainn*, which also has the variant *Maol Eachlainn* (from earlier *Maol Sh-*). Giolla Brighde uses both *Maol Seachlainn* and *Maol Eachlainn* (the variation is confirmed by *uaim*) to refer to the same individual in his *Do shlán uaim, a Áth Seanaigh*. For *Maol E-*, see IV.16c, 23a, 27a, et passim; for *Maol S-*, see IV.12a, 20d and 22a. I know of no metrically-confirmed instance of nom./acc. *Maol Sheachlainn* in bardic poetry.

38 A quick perusal of the poetry of Giolla Brighde will reveal many variants forms. A full glossary would be required to capture the extent of variation in the corpus. In what follows, I seek only to draw attention to a few examples of the linguistic variation we encounter in Mac Con Midhe’s poetry in order to examine what use he made of the options available to him in composing a given poem and why.

Hiatus

39 IGT III §42 deals with a small number of hiatus verbs like *snáeïdh* ‘swims’ (two syllables with a break between *-áe-* and *-i-*).⁸⁶ Hiatus is not obligatory in the verbs listed and so they have a double paradigm: *snáeïdh* has a variant *snáïdh* (one syllable with *ái* a single vowel). Among the verbs grouped under this paradigm is *béarla an chora* ‘the suppletive forms of *cuiridh* “casts”’. In the tracts, the term *béarla* + verbal noun describes verbal forms that do not have their own verbal noun (as understood by bardic grammarians, in any event) and are regarded as suppletive to another verb.⁸⁷ *Béarla an chora* is the label for verbal forms in *lá-* that were originally perfective to Old Irish *fo-ceird* ‘puts, throws, casts’; these suppletive forms eventually gave rise to a new simple verb which, following IGT III and using normalised spelling, has as its 3 sing. present indicative *láeïdh* /*láïdh*, with the same variation as that in *snáeïdh*/*snáïdh*. In Giolla Brighde’s *Do shlán uaim, a Áth Seanaigh*, we find forms of *béarla an chora* with and without hiatus.

A í Chonaill Chláir Eanaigh,

láïdh orainn bhar n-aoindeabhaidh

‘O descendant of Conall of Clár Eanaigh, your one battle oppresses us’ (IV.9ab)

In the above half-quatrain monosyllabic 3 sing. present indicative *láïdh* is confirmed by syllable-count and by the rhyme with *Cláir*. But elsewhere in the same poem, a hiatus form of the past autonomous is required for syllable-count and internal rhyme:

⁸⁶ The spelling in IGT III is *snaeiïdh*. In the tracts, <aei> or <ae> is a spelling of <ai> in final position or hiatus, <áei> or <áe> a spelling of <ái> in the same environments. The vowel in the first syllable of *snáeïdh* is shortened in hiatus, but when it appears in other environments it will be long: *do shnáe(i)* ‘she swam’. It is inadvisable to normalise the spelling of these forms to *snaoiïdh*, *do shnaoi*, etc. as, unlike <áei> or <áe>, <aoi> or <ái> is not subject to shortening in hiatus. <aoi> was probably pronounced /i:/ and <áei> or <áe> /a:/. See Hoyne, ‘Early Modern Irish miscellanea’, 174–6.

⁸⁷ For *béarla* ‘suppletive verbal forms’, see Hoyne, ‘*Seacht bpearsain fhichead uair mé*’, 117.

Mo rath do sgaradh rem sglainn;

cath do laadh ar Lochlainn

‘My good fortune has parted from my breast; battle was joined against Lochlann’
(IV.35ab)

The internal rhyme in the last-cited half-quatrain is noteworthy: *do laadh* rhymes with *do sgaradh* (and we must assume that Giolla Brighde intended the rhyme to be perfect), but strictly speaking this could be regarded as a broken rhyme, as the *-r-* of *sgaradh* is not matched by an appropriate consonant in *do laadh*; in the ordinary run of things, a single *r* should rhyme with another *r* or with any of the other ‘light’ consonants (*l, n, mh, bh, gh* or *dh*). A similar rhyme occasioned a disagreement between bardic authorities which is recorded in a copy of *IGT* III, where the following lines are cited.

A chlú oraib ’gun oireacht

gur gnodeaig tú in teachtaireacht

‘You are credited in the assembly with success in the errand’⁸⁸

The rhyme between *oraibh* and *gnodhaigh* (normalised spelling) is at first glance unremarkable, but *gnöaighidh* is a hiatus verb and historically the <dh> after *gno-* is no more than a hiatus-marker. Nonetheless in the rhyme *oraibh : gnodhaigh* the <dh> is treated as if it were a ‘light’ consonant like the *-r-* of *oraibh*.⁸⁹ At least one school (the Ó hUiginn academy

⁸⁸ *IGT* III ex. 924, translated and discussed by McManus, ‘Fault-finding in the grammatical tracts’, 207–8. See also Hoyne, ‘*Seacht bpearsain fhichead uair mé*’, 110.

⁸⁹ Mac Con Midhe hardly intended that the *-r-* of *do sgaradh* should not have a corresponding rhyming ‘consonant’ in *do laadh*. Presumably *do laadh* was realised with a semivowel [w] at the hiatus-juncture. Intervocalic *-dh-* and *-gh-* had become vocalic by this period, i.e. when realised at all in these positions, they tended to be pronounced as a semivowel [w] after a broad vowel or as a semivowel [j] after a slender vowel (McManus, ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, 351–2). The phonetic rhyming system used in bardic poetry had been gradually refined prior to these developments and so reflected an earlier phonology: for rhyming purposes, intervocalic *-dh-* was still treated as if it had the phonetic properties of a voiced fricative, even though Giolla Brighde would most likely have pronounced the <dh> of a word like *pudhar*, which still counts as disyllabic in bardic poetry, as /pu^wər/, at least for the purposes of poetry. If a semivowel was also heard at the hiatus-juncture (and there are traces of such a semivowel in forms like *subháilc(h)e* from earlier *suáilche*, [the spelling Siobhán beside Siuán](#); cf. [Seán and Seaghán etc.](#)), on the analogy of the ‘consonantal’ semivowel of words like *pudhar*, Mac Con Midhe could count this hiatus semivowel as if it belonged to the ‘light’ class of consonants.

at Cill Chluaine) regarded the rhyme *oraibh : gnodhaigh* as correct, but the majority of copies of *IGT* III (and, indeed, the archetype from which all of the copies of *IGT* III ultimately descend) mark the rhyme as faulty. If the rhyme *do laadh : sgaradh* is genuine (and I see no reason to believe it is not), it appears that the Í Uiginn of Cill Chluaine would have found support from Giolla Brighde in their treatment of the hiatus-juncture in *gnöaighidh*.⁹⁰

Sléagar

40 In the Classical Modern Irish register, bardic poets had flexibility not only with regard to the interchange of variant forms of individual words but even in the use of initial mutations. An interesting case is that of *sléagar*, which is described in *IGT* I⁹¹ and has recently been the subject of a study by Eoin Mac Cárthaigh.⁹² To take a simple example: in a genitive phrase of the type ‘the A of the B of the C’ (for example, ‘the gate of the house of the school’), *sléagar* allowed for lenition (or non-lenition) on Point B, where, in the ordinary run of things, this would not be expected. In Classical Modern Irish, therefore, the nominative phrase ‘the gate of the house of the school’ could be rendered *geata thighe na sgoile*; genitive *tighe* is lenited, but this lenition is not caused by masculine *geata*. Those familiar with the living language will, of course, recognise lenition under the same circumstances in Modern Irish *geata theach na scoile*, with the further development that the redundant morphological marking of the genitive at Point B in *the string of genitives* ‘the A of the B of the C’ has been done away with.⁹³

⁹⁰ Giolla Brighde’s rhyming of *sgaradh* and *laadh* would have fallen afoul of bardic grammarians for another reason. Following *IGT* III, the root of all hiatus-forms of *láeidh* should have slender offset (i.e. *lái-* + *-idh*). This appears to be a later development (see *eDIL* s.v. *láid* for hiatus forms in *lá-* with broad offset + verbal endings) and could perhaps be added to the list of survivals of extinct older features in Mac Con Midhe’s work.

⁹¹ See Mac Cárthaigh, *The Art of Bardic Poetry*, 148–9, 295–7.

⁹² ‘*Sléagar* agus “genitives lenited in special circumstances” i bhFilíocht na Scol’.

⁹³ *Sléagar* may also lie behind the lenition of a noun in the genitive plural after the noun it qualifies in Scottish Gaelic, e.g. *mòran dhaoine* ‘a lot of people’. Scottish Gaelic has reached a stage where the *sléagar*-lenition kicks in even without Point C. That this lenition has become specialised to the genitive plural in Gàidhlig is probably best explained by the fact that at an earlier period Point B in the string ‘the A of the B of the C’ was often genitive plural (e.g. *sluagh Fhear nÉireann* ‘the host of the Irish’). Cf. Williams’s note on V.17c (p. 277), where the nature of *sléagar* is somewhat misrepresented. As we would expect if *sléagar* lies behind the anomalous lenition in Irish *geata theach na scoile* and Scottish Gaelic *mòran dhaoine*, *sléagar* has its origins in the Middle Irish period; for examples from the Book of Leinster, see *rí chóicid Chon Ruí* and *rí chóicid Echach meic Luctai* (cited in Breatnach, ‘An Mheán-Ghaeilge’, 237). Note that *sléagar* also covers lenition on Point B where Point C is an adjective rather than another noun-phrase in the genitive.

41 *Sléagar* was not obligatory in Classical Modern Irish; nothing prevented a poet from writing *geata tighe na sgoile* or *geata thighe na sgoile*. Given the strict rules of *uaim*, however, the ability to supply or block lenition on Point B was of some importance. Most consonants alliterate only with themselves regardless of whether they are lenited or nasalised, but there are exceptions. Among the exceptions is *f*:- it makes *uaim* with itself (*f*-) and with its nasalised counterpart *bhf*-, but not with *fh*-, which is lenited out of existence (and especially in early manuscripts often omitted in writing). *Fh*- + vowel makes *uaim* as a vowel-initial word; *fh*- + consonant makes *uaim* as if the word began with that consonant.

42 A single quatrain by Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe neatly illustrates the usefulness of optional *sléagar* to the bardic poet. I mark alliteration in the usual way.

*Buille dícheannta °fear °bhFáil*⁹⁴

bás Í Néill °Oiligh °fhódbháin;

cuibhreach °Gaoidheal an °geal seang

agus sgaoileadh fh°ear n°Éireann.

‘The death of Ó Néill of Aileach of the white turf was the blow that beheaded the men of Ireland; the pale, slender one was the bond of the Irish and the scattering of the men of Ireland.’ (XIII.53)

In line *a* we have a *sléagar* string ~~of genitives~~, which for our purposes I will analyse as *buille dícheannta* ‘the beheading blow’ (A) + gen. pl. *fear* (B) + gen. sing. *Fáil* (C). Historically, there is no need for lenition of *fear* after *buille dícheannta* – indeed, in Classical Modern Irish a syncope genitive singular (*dícheannta* is the genitive of *dícheannadh*) will normally not lenite the following word – but *sléagar* would make it possible here, if the poet required it. That *fear* is not lenited in line *a* is confirmed by *uaim* with *bhFáil*; reading *fhear* would deprive the line of the required alliteration between the penultimate stressed word in the line (*fear*) and the stressed word preceding or following it. In line *d*, however, *fhear* is lenited, as part of the sequence *sgaoileadh* (A) + gen. pl. *fhear* (B) + gen. sing. *nÉireann* (C). Nom. sing. masc. *sgaoileadh* does not cause this lenition; rather lenition is caused at Point B because of its place in a *sléagar* sequence ~~of genitives~~. Grammatically speaking the lenition

⁹⁴ Williams reads *bhfear bhFáil*, noting non-nasalised *fear* in the variant readings, but *fear bhFáil* is the correct reading.

of *fhear* is optional after *sgaoileadh* but we must read *fhear* for alliteration: in line *d*, the final word of the line, which must be stressed, makes *uaim* with the penultimate stressed word: *fhear* makes *uaim* with *Éireann*; the purely orthographical *fh*- and the nasalisation after the gen. pl. do not interfere with this alliteration. This quatrain provides us, therefore, with two examples of the sequence ‘the A of the B of the C’, one in which the option of lenition is not availed of and one in which *sléagar*-lenition is employed, both confirmed by metre.

The article and relative clauses

43 An area of Classical Modern Irish that would repay further study is that of syntax. It is well known that word order is freer in poetry than in prose, but the limits of this flexibility are not yet properly understood or described. We have already seen some examples of syntax that would be unusual in prose (fn. 675 above). Here I will only draw attention to a minor area of variation in the syntax of the article. This syntactical feature is not unique to poetry, but the variation involved has a bearing on metre.

44 In Irish syntax (as in the syntax of other languages), it is important to distinguish between ‘restrictive’ (or ‘defining’) and ‘non-restrictive’ (or ‘non-defining’) relative clauses. Simply put, a restrictive relative clause provides essential information about a headword (‘the individual who composed this poem’, ‘the edition you sent me’), while a non-restrictive relative clause gives additional information about a headword but is not an essential part of it (‘Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, who composed this poem’, ‘Williams’s edition, for which we should all be very grateful’). In Classical Modern Irish, the article is optional before the headword of a restrictive relative clause.⁹⁵ *BST* 215.7 gives the sentence *as tú an fear ’sa bhean mhealluim* ‘you are the man whose wife I am seducing’, with the qualification *.c. gan tshunnradh* ‘[also] correct without the article’, i.e. *as tú fear ’sa bhean mhealluim* is also correct in the same sense.⁹⁶ The presence or absence of the article can, of course, have consequences for syllable-count, and a poet might therefore choose to retain the article or delete it for metrical reasons.

⁹⁵ For the situation in Old and Middle Irish, see Uhlich, ‘Zum Artikelgebrauch beim Bezugswort eines Relativsatzes’. After pronouns the article can still be dropped in Modern Irish (e.g. *Bhí fear ann fadó agus is é ainm a bhí air ná Séadna* at the beginning of Peadar Ua Laoghaire’s famous novel of the same name).

⁹⁶ See Uhlich, ‘Zum Artikelgebrauch beim Bezugswort eines Relativsatzes’, 461 n. 74.

45 In Giolla Brighde’s *Caidhead ceithre teallaigh Teamhra?* (I) we have a nice juxtaposition of two similarly constructed restrictive relative clauses, one with the article and one without, both confirmed by syllable-count. The first is as follows:

don fhior is só ar méad a mhuirne

créad nach dó budh cuibhdhe cách?

‘why should not all people be more fitting subjects to a man junior in rank if he enjoyed such great popularity?’ (I.15cd)

We must emend Williams’s translation to read ‘the youngest man’ or ‘the man most junior in rank’ rather than ‘a man junior in rank’. The metre is *séadnaoidh* and this requires eight syllables in the first line of each half-quatrain; once we elide the vowel of *ar* (this elision is not optional), we have the required number of syllables. If we read *d’fhior* rather than *don fhior*, that is, if Giolla Brighde had availed of the option of omitting the article before the headword of the restrictive relative clause *is só* (<*as ó*, lit. ‘who is youngest’), the line would be a syllable short. Only five quatrains later, however, the article is elided and there is no possibility of supplying it editorially:

ris nach falchoid tíre a dtoirthe,

banchoig ríghes is fhoirfe uainn

‘he is the man from whom regions to not hide their fruit, the most excellent cook of kingship that we can provide’ (I.20cd)

There must be seven syllables in the second line of each half-quatrain in *séadnaoidh*. In this example, *is* is subject to obligatory vowel-elision. If we were to supply the article to the headword *banchoig ríghes*, the line would become hypersyllabic.⁹⁷

Middle quantity

⁹⁷ From the same poem, see also *crobhaing is díon do* [MS *dā*] *gach deoraidh / Síol Conaill, Síol Eoghain aird*, ‘a family that protects every stranger, the Race of Conall, the Race of noble Eoghan’ (I.2cd), which I would take to mean rather ‘the family...’. The only other metrically confirmed instance of this type of article-omission in this poem that I have noticed is 21c *tar rígh is só is é do toghadh*, translated into natural English by Williams as ‘he it is who was chosen rather than a younger king’, more literally, ‘rather than the younger king it is he who was chosen’. (Note that in 21c, we must read *is ó* rather than *is só* for *uaim*. For (s)ó, comparative and superlative of *óg*, see McManus, ‘An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach’, 388.)

46 In Early Modern Irish, one can speak of short and long quantity in a given syllable. For example, in *fear* we have a short vowel, while in *féar* the vowel (and hence the syllable) is long. In addition, there are syllables whose length is intermediate between short and long (e.g. *fearr*). This is known as ‘middle quantity’ (*síneadh meadhónach*).⁹⁸ Middle quantity occurs when a short vowel is followed by

- (a) *-nn-, -ll-, -rr-, -m* or *-ng* (e.g. *gleann, mall, barr, trom, seang*)⁹⁹
- (b) *-nn-, -ll-,* etc. + any consonant (e.g. *gleannta, timpeall*)
- (c) a consonant cluster consisting of a ‘light’ consonant (*bh, dh, gh, l, mh, n, r*) + a ‘hard’ consonant (*b, d, g*) (e.g. *bard, Tadhg*)
- (d) a consonant cluster consisting of a ‘light’ consonant + another ‘light’ consonant (e.g. *corn, tarla*).

Middle quantity appears to be optional when a short vowel is followed by

- (a) a consonant cluster consisting of a ‘light’ consonant + *s* (e.g. *inse*)
- (b) a consonant cluster consisting of a ‘light’ consonant + a ‘rough’ consonant (*ch, f, ph, th*) (e.g. *manchaibh*)
- (c) a consonant cluster consisting of a ‘light’ consonant + a ‘soft’ consonant (*p, t, c*) (e.g. *Ultach*).

The presence of middle quantity is sometimes indicated with a length-mark in manuscripts (e.g. *árd*) or by the doubling of a ‘light’ consonant (e.g. *innse*). Only rhyming examples are truly diagnostic for the presence or absence of middle quantity, however. In rhyme, corresponding vowels must be in syllables of the same length: *bean* (short) will rhyme with *fear* (short) but not with *féar* (long) or *fearr* (middle), even in broken rhyme.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ For more information on middle quantity, see Greene, ‘Middle quantity in Irish’, Ó Curnáin, ‘An dán díreach, carnach, meánach’, and especially Mac Cárthaigh, *The Art of Bardic Poetry*, pp. 168–71.

⁹⁹ Middle quantity is lost when *-nn-, -ll-* etc. are followed by a vowel, e.g. *gleanna, malla*.

¹⁰⁰ The one exception to the rule that corresponding syllables must have the same length is *rinn : airdrinn* rhymes where a monosyllabic word ending in a long vowel can rhyme with a polysyllabic word ending in a short vowel (e.g. *mé : cruinne*).

47 At first glance, it appears that in middle quantity we have yet another weapon in the poet's armoury: a poet was free to choose whether *manchaibh* had a half-long or short first syllable and so had further flexibility in rhyme. The distribution of seemingly optional middle quantity may be more complicated than free variation, however. After declaring that middle quantity is optional in words like *inse* and *manchaibh*, IGT I adds the vague caveat *muna seachantur do dhá phríomhlocht na Gaoidheilge é, mur a-tá: neimhtheacht céille nó seirbhe ráidh*, 'unless that is avoided because of the two cardinal faults of Irish – that is, not making sense or harshness of sound'.¹⁰¹ Quite what this proviso means is not clear.

48 As a small contribution to understanding vowel quantity variation in the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, I examine here diagnostic rhyming examples of optional pattern B above. By 'diagnostic' I mean, in this context, rhymes which prove whether a given syllable is short or half-long. A rhyming pair like *folchaidh : onchoin* is not diagnostic for vowel quantity in the first syllable, as both *-lch-* and *-nch-* belong to the 'optional' pattern B above. A rhyme such as *seanchas : ceannchas* is diagnostic for middle quantity, as the *-nnch-* ('firm' consonant + another consonant) of *ceannchas* should regularly result in a half-long syllable.

49 I begin with short vowel + 'light' consonant + *-ch-*, viz. *-nch-*, *-dhch-*, *-lch-*, *-mhch-* and *-rch-*.¹⁰² The sequence short vowel + *-nch-* certainly causes middle quantity in Giolla Brighde's poetry: I.1cd *seanchas : ceannchas*; III.12cd *onchoin : Chonollchoibh*; X.23cd *onchoin : tonnchladh*; XVIII.2cd *seanChorcaigh : gceannphortaibh*. I have noted only two instances of short quantity in a sequence of this type and, unlike the examples given above, both occur in unstressed syllables and are perhaps best treated separately: III.12cd *ingeanchruinn*¹⁰³ : *finnEachlainn* and XVII.11ab *iodhainchill : aifrinn*. All the diagnostic examples of the sequence short vowel + *-rch-* show middle quantity: I.11 *oirchill : doinnChinn*, XIII.33cd *torchoir : Lochlannchaibh*, XVII.39cd *fearchonta : pheallchorcra*, XIX.11cd *toirchim : oimchinn*.¹⁰⁴ The sequence short vowel + *-lch-* shows clear variation but

¹⁰¹ Mac Cárthaigh, *The Art of Bardic Poetry*, 138–9.

¹⁰² In what follows, I cite the word under discussion first and then its rhyming partner, even when the word in question is the *airdrinn* word in a *rinn : airdrinn* rhyme. I have not noticed any examples of the cluster *-bhch-* diagnostic for short or half-long quantity in Mac Con Midhe's poetry. The cluster *-ghch-* is impossible in Classical Modern Irish: when *-gh* and *c-* meet at the juncture of a compound word, *-gh* is devoiced and denited, so that *deaghchlann*, for example, rhymes as if written *deaclann*.

¹⁰³ Not *inghean-* as printed by Williams.

¹⁰⁴ The problematic rhyme I.9 *ndochruidhe : torchuirthe* is not a relevant example. As Williams notes, the manuscript is difficult to make out at this point. I would read *sochruidhe* in place of *torchuirthe* (I can make out

the majority of examples do not have middle quantity. In V.22cd *fhólchas* : *donnchas*, we have middle quantity, but in IV.12cd *ghealchruinn* : *Seachlainn*, IV.22ab and XIII.73cd *gealChuinn* : *Seachluinn*, XII.7cd *gealchlár* : *seachrán* the first syllable of the relevant words is short. See also IV.16a *gealChuinn*.¹⁰⁵ I have only one diagnostic example of the sequence short vowel + *-chmh-* and it occurs in a short unstressed syllable: IV.16cd *chlaidheamhchuirr* : *Eachluinn*.

I have no sure examples of the sequence short vowel + *-dhch-* with middle quantity in Mac Con Midhe's poetry. The rhyme *éanoidhche* : *fhóirbhthe* (II.11ab) requires some comment. The sequence *-bhth-* is frequently spelt *-f-* in manuscripts, as it would no doubt have been pronounced in vernacular Irish;¹⁰⁶ indeed, Williams notes *foirfe* among the manuscript variants in this very instance. Even outside of the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, rhyming examples of *foirbhthe* (or *foirfe*) diagnostic for quantity are rare, but note, for example, *coirmthe* : *foirbhthe* (IGT II ex. 2071). This indicates that *foirbhthe* does indeed rhyme with a half-long first syllable (as we would expect with *-rbh-*), but if *foirbhthe* was, despite the historical spelling, actually realised as *foirfe*, this might be no more than an example of precisely the sort of variation in the sequence short vowel + 'light' consonant + 'rough' consonant that we are investigating here. More straightforwardly, I note the rhyme *míodhchar* : *chíothmhar* (VIII.15bd), which confirms a short first syllable in *-dhch-*.

50 We turn now to the sequence short vowel + 'light' consonant + *-th-*, viz. *-bhth-*, *-ghth-*, and *-rth-*.¹⁰⁷ All of the diagnostic examples show short quantity: X.8cd *gabhtha* : *bachla*; X.2cd *aighthe* : *aithne*, 27cd *aighthe* : *aithbhe*, XI.2cd *aighthe* : *anaithne*, 4cd *aíndlightheach* : *críthreach*, XV.7cd *aighthe* : *ghraifne*; I.28cd *tairtheach* : *laithmheach*, IX.11cd *turchoirthe* : *soichle*, XVIII.30cd *nathrach* : *freagarthach*, *XXII.14cd *tairthighe* : *aithrighe*.

51 The sequence short vowel + 'light' consonant + *ph* or *f* does not occur very commonly, and there are no examples in Giolla Brighde's poetry diagnostic for our purposes.

socr- in the manuscript). This would give us perfect rhyme, but the rhyme would not be diagnostic for our purposes.

¹⁰⁵ The rhyme with 16b *deaghanfuinn* is problematic and probably corrupt, but as that particular poem is in *deibhidhe imrinn*, *gealChuinn* must also rhyme with 16c *Eachluinn*, which proves the short quantity of *gealCh-*.

¹⁰⁶ McManus, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach', 351–2.

¹⁰⁷ I have not noticed any diagnostic examples of the sequence *-mhth-* in Mac Con Midhe's poetry. The sequences *-dhth-*, *-lth-* and *-nth-* are not possible in Classical Modern Irish, owing to homorganic delentition. Cf. fn. 1029 above.

52 The picture that emerges from this small case study is (to my mind) surprisingly fuzzy. In stressed syllables, the sequences short vowel + *-nch-* and short vowel + *-rch-* always result in middle quantity (at least where this can be tested), but there is variation in the sequence short vowel + *-lch-* with short quantity being the norm. Is it significant that the one instance of middle quantity in the sequence short vowel + *-lch-* is a result of syncope rather than compounding (*folchas* is the relative present of *folchaidh*, *ní fholaigh*, vn. *folach*)? This distinction does not appear to play a role in the sequence *-nch-*, where *seanChorcaigh* has a half-long first syllable though it is transparently a compound of *sean-* and acc. *Corcaigh*. In Giolla Brighde's poetry a 'light' consonant followed by *th* never causes middle quantity (at least where this can be tested), but it certainly does elsewhere.¹⁰⁸ Should we chalk up to chance and the problematic nature of the evidence the absence of half-long syllables in the sequence short vowel + 'light' consonant + *-th-* in Mac Con Midhe's poetry or might we have here another candidate for variation between schools or over time? Further research is clearly required.¹⁰⁹ Whether the variation in middle quantity described in the tracts should be viewed as simply another tool in the poet's kit, like *sléagar* or the optional omission of the article in certain types of relative clauses, remains for now an open question.

CONCLUSION

53 In this paper I have sought to shed light on some linguistic and metrical aspects of the work of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe and issues relating to how his work was transmitted to us. There is a great deal more that could be said on these topics and no shortage of fundamental research to be done. The publication in 1980 by the Irish Texts Society of the poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe was an important event in the study of Classical Modern Irish. It made available for the first time in a convenient format the work of one of the acknowledged masters of medieval Irish poetry and one of the earliest Classical Modern Irish poets. This edition has been used with profit by scholars of the subject ever since. Since the 1980s, the work of editing and interpreting bardic poetry has continued, and it is fair to say that the field of Classical Modern Irish is currently experiencing something of a

¹⁰⁸ To take just one example, see *An dá chrann dírghe, a Dhonnchaidh. sgríbhne ar chomhthuibh Chlann cCarrthaigh*, 'The two straight [spear-]shafts, O Donnchadh, are charters to the submissions of the Mac Carthys' (IGT II ex. 1360). As is reflected in the spelling with a double *-r-*, gen. *Carthaigh* must have a half-long first syllable here to make perfect consonance (*uaitne shlán*) with *Donnchaidh*; note too that the sequence *-mhth-* in *comhthaibh* must cause middle quantity here as it makes *aicill* with *Donnchaidh*.

¹⁰⁹ For a fuller study of the consonant clusters here and the distribution of middle quantity in them, see Ó Curnáin, 'An dán díreach, carnach, meánach', 357–64.

renaissance. Dr Katharine Simms's online Bardic Poetry Database went live in 2004, making available a searchable index to the extant corpus, an invaluable resource accessible anywhere in the world and capable of producing in seconds answers to complicated queries that would previously have required arduous and time-consuming investigation in an Irish research library. This was followed by Trinity College's Bardic Poetry Project in 2008, which led to the creation of an electronic corpus of nearly two thousand bardic poems, including more than five hundred poems until then only accessible in manuscript.¹¹⁰ Eoin Mac Cárthaigh and Elaine Uí Dhonnchadha of TCD are at present taking this electronic corpus a step further by lemmatising the texts, something that will allow a user with Modern Irish to arrive more quickly at desired information regardless of the vagaries of manuscript spelling and the multiplicity of variant forms. Full editions of individual poems and studies of linguistic, metrical, literary and historical topics appear regularly in journals of Irish philology and the proceedings of conferences. In its capacity as a publisher, the Dublin Institute's School of Celtic Studies recently inaugurated a dedicated series devoted to book-length editions of Early Modern Irish literature the inaugural volume of which was devoted to bardic poetry. In this context, there is ample cause to hope that the poetry of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe, which was so assiduously studied by the bardic grammarian-prosodists of the sixteenth century, will continue to attract the attention of scholars and inspire further research.

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¹¹⁰ Now published in McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, *A Bardic Miscellany*. The TCD electronic corpus of bardic poetry has now been married with Katharine Simms's Database and it is now possible to access both Dr Simms's metadata on a poem and the text of the poem itself at bardic.celt.dias.ie.

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